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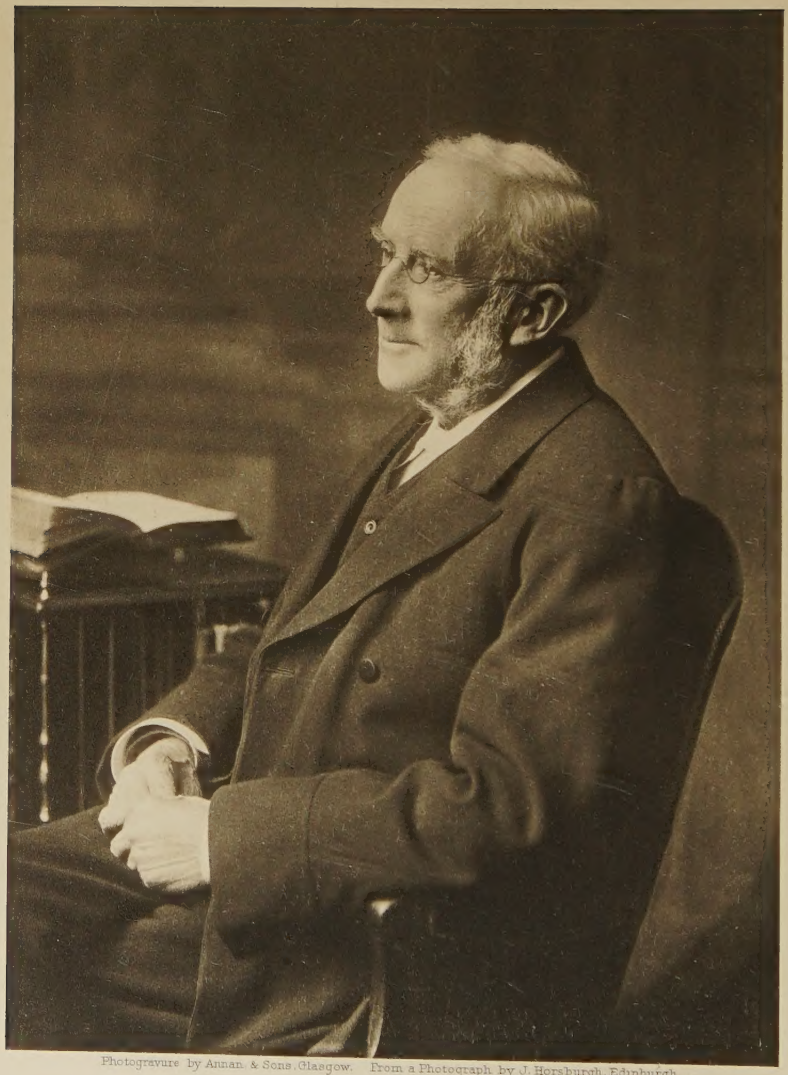

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A B Davidson

THE CALLED OF GOD

BY THE LATE

A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D., LITT.D.

PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH

EDITED BY

PROFESSOR J. A. PATERSON, D.D.

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

By A. TAYLOR INNES, ADVOCATE

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
	Biographical Introduction	1
I.	The Call of Abraham	59
II.	Jacob at Bethel	85
III.	Jacob at Peniel	105
IV.	Moses on Mount Sinai	127
V.	Saul's Reprobation	141
VI.	Elijah's Flight	163
VII.	The Call of Isaiah	185
VIII.	The Call of Jeremiah	207
IX.	John the Baptist	227
X.	Nicodemus	247
XI.	Zacchæus	273
XII.	The Rich Young Ruler	299
XIII.	Thomas	317

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

PROFESSOR A. B. DAVIDSON of Edinburgh was known and revered far beyond the limits of Scotland. Dr. Driver, for example, writing from Oxford, says of him that while he was, during life, the guide of a time which greatly needed guidance in order to effect a difficult transition, he will still continue by his writings to teach many generations of readers. And I heard Canon Gore, in his admirable address on the subject of Christian union, (delivered at the beginning of Davidson's last session and just before his own appointment to the see of Worcester), explain that one reason for his desire to lay those views before the New College of Edinburgh was the deep reverence he felt for its famous teacher then present, but now gone. Yet the man who exerted such an influence was himself singularly reserved and little known. And many went to hear his rare and occasional sermons, not merely because they struck upon their own hearts, but because they brought them nearer than anything else to the mind and heart of the speaker.

It seems permissible, therefore, to preface a volume

of Dr. Davidson's selected sermons with some record of his youthful life, and of the influences under which he became the man and the preacher he was.

"It is strange," he once said from the pulpit, "how all that we ever are we become in our early years." ANDREW BRUCE DAVIDSON was a native of Aberdeenshire, and his whole life took colour from that naked shoulder which our island thrusts into the cold North Sea. He was born in the year 1831 (probably about the end of that year, the exact date not appearing in any register), on the farm of Kirkhill, in the parish of Ellon. From Ellon the river Ythan flows eastward to the sea, and road and rail run south to Aberdeen. The city is not quite twenty miles away; yet the railway to it has been blocked by the snow for nearly two days of winter, while a Hebrew professor had to struggle on foot for miles to escape from the line to a friendly home. The upland part of Ellon parish lies, too, on rather bare gneiss and granite; and Kirkhill, which is three miles from the village, was never more than a hundred acres in extent during the time when Professor Davidson's father farmed it, and reclaimed great part from the waste.

The father, *Andrew Davidson*, was born in Forfarshire, but came early to Tarves, in the county of Aberdeen, where he rented and wrought a lime-quarry. Working one day at the upper ledge of rock, he let the heavy iron lever slip from him. Clutching

the end of it, he shouted to the men below to escape from danger, but held on himself with one hand till he fell headlong into the quarry. It was the close of his quarrying. He took the small farm of Kirkhill in Ellon, and removed there with the young wife whom he had married in Tarves. *Helen Bruce* had been born near Edinburgh, but came north as a mere child, and was very young when she married. In Kirkhill their four sons and two daughters were born, Andrew being the youngest child. And in Kirkhill they resided till the father died in 1863, in his eightieth year, just about the time that his son in Edinburgh was made colleague of the professor to whom he had hitherto been assistant. In Kirkhill, too, then farmed by her eldest son William, the mother lived on till her death in 1876 at the ripe age of eighty-six.

Andrew Davidson, the elder, was a remarkable man, of a type well known in that land of granite. Tall and fair, he remained well built and powerful even after his contest with the quarry, and when serving with the militia used to be ranked as "right hand man." But he was stern and austere; just in life, but cautious in action, and amazingly slow to speak; and the kindness of heart within was seldom allowed to flow upon the surface. Further description of him, however, is superseded by a passage in one of his son's early sermons. Professor Davidson, among his friends the most reserved and unautobiographical of men, seems to have found occasional relief in confiding aspects of his

private life to a whole congregation, which he knew would be unable to recognise them. Thus, in speaking of the "Son of Man," he gives reasons why that phrase must mean more than mere pre-eminent beauty or greatness of character in one man among others. If he is a mere man, the preacher went on—

"He stands in no connexion with me, He has done nothing for me, He never had and never could have any thoughts of me; there is no relationship between me and Him, and with all the sublimity of the life He lived, I feel I cannot greatly love Him. *Ah! that imperfect, toiling, common-place man, with few pretensions to intellect, with small claim upon the world's recognition or regard, but whom I look to as my father in the flesh, who fed me, and taught me, and who I know loves me—him I love, more deeply, more tenderly, and with more blessed effects upon my spiritual nature —imperfect though he be, sometimes capricious, often stern, and to my fancy unreasonable, though he seem*— than I can this great, and in his isolation dreary, perfect man. But merely great, Christ is not: He is man, but He is God, my God, who made me, 'in whose book all my members were written.'"

The words in italics, used by an ordinary speaker, might not necessarily describe or recall the father of him who spoke. But after the preacher's death I read them to his immediately elder brother, the only son now living of Andrew Davidson of Kirkhill. And his in-

stant remark was: "There could be no truer picture of my father."

The mother was a little woman, with the very black hair and ruddy complexion which she transmitted to her son Andrew. Conscientious and intelligent, like her husband, she had in addition great warmth and vivacity, a sanguine and buoyant temper, a keen and ready tongue, and an ardent interest in the Evangelical revival of the day. As the moving spirit of the household, she encountered many frustrations and successes; but the plans we have to do with are those she made for her youngest son. For forty years that son and she lived in full mutual affection, and it was stamped even upon his name. For by Scottish law any one may take a name or make a name; and the subject of our notice, who down to his matriculation at college was called by his baptismal appellation of Andrew, chose thereafter to be known as Andrew Bruce Davidson.

The husband and wife, contrasted in character as we have seen, are not said to have differed more than is usual and desirable in that relation. But their recorded differences were on points which seldom divide a peasant home elsewhere than in Scotland. And they were points which had a remarkable influence on the future of the youngest son. For the one difference had to do with the Church, and the other with the University.

Ellon had a distinguished place in this period of the history of the Church of Scotland. It was the period when Liberalism, a second time triumphant on the

continent, recovered Britain also to its allegiance; and the Scottish Church, responsive to that world-wide influence, and to a higher, seemed entering upon a period of unexampled energy and life. Within the Establishment the Evangelical party found itself, for the first time for a hundred years, in a majority; and under the leadership of Dr. Chalmers it asserted its old doctrine of church autonomy by three acts of legislation, recognised in the present day as admirably adapted to the necessities of that time. But Aberdeenshire had always been the stronghold of the other and reform-resisting or Moderate party; and its Presbytery of Strathbogie, and the new minister at Ellon, were the best known opponents of this dangerous claim of an Established Church to self-government. "Robertson of Ellon" became deservedly celebrated; and as the impersonation to the young eyes of A. B. Davidson of that Church in whose service the boy's whole life was to be spent, it may be well to give his portrait, drawn by no less skilful a hand than that of Hugh Miller. The stone-mason of Cromarty visited the Assembly and saw a man—

"In stature not exceeding the middle size, but otherwise of such large proportions that they might serve a robust man of six feet. We read of ships of the line cut down to frigates, and of frigates cut down to gunboats. Here is a very large man cut down to the middle size. . . . The man we describe — if there be truth in natural signs, or if nature has written her

mark with no wilful intention to deceive—could lead and head a mob. But where is conjecture carrying us?—That uncouth, powerful-looking man, so fitted apparently for leading the masses broken loose, is the great friend and *confidant*, and so far at least as argument and statement are concerned, the grand caterer—flapper, as Gulliver would perhaps say, of the Tory Earls of Dalhousie, Haddington, and Aberdeen. If nature intended him for a popular leader, never surely was there an individual more sadly misplaced. We have before us Mr. Robertson of Ellon—the second name, and first man, of his party."

Already formidable in the Assembly, he was equally so to the more timid youth of his energetically cared for parish. "He was a terror," said one of the Kirkhill boys, remembering how his little brother Andrew stood paralysed with shyness as the minister thundered questions at him in a public catechising. But the father behind the plough was better able to appreciate the "character, courage, and momentum"[1] of his pastor, and to the end of his days he admired him. Mr. Robertson of Ellon always rightly held that the Church's acts of legislation exposed it to the risk of disestablishment. And Andrew Davidson agreed with him, disregarding his wife's pleading for a freer and warmer religious life. All through the parish in those years the same discussion went on, and at the blacksmith's forge every evening the clash of law and gospel sent out

[1] Hugh Miller.

whirling sparks of debate.[1] But soon the situation became critical. The Church of Scotland issued its manifesto of 1842, accepting the situation, and explaining that even at the risk of disestablishment it must maintain its "inalienable liberties" in its own affairs. The minister of Ellon read it, and that evening rose in Assembly to join his opponents in complaining of the lawyers' "usurpation of ecclesiastical jurisdiction." And though after all he declined to go out at the Disruption, from that night "the first man of his party" gradually separated from it, and to him more than any other must be ascribed the merit of frustrating the attempt to answer that momentous Protest.[2] For Andrew Davidson, as for many another head of a family in Scotland, a more serious question now arose. Refusing on the one hand to join in the exultation of the majority of the parish, who boasted that at last the Church would have to yield to force; refusing on the other to be swayed by the tears and entreaties of his wife,—the still, strong man locked himself into the stable, and spent hours of solitary self-surrender and prayer. But, when he at last opened that shut door, the question was settled for himself and his family.

It was the youngest of the sons whose prospects were chiefly affected by it. Of the four, the eldest, a brilliant

[1] There is a vivid reproduction of the time—and still more of the people—in a work of genius, *Johnnie Gibb of Gushetneuk*.

[2] See Dr. Charteris's excellent *Life of the Rev. James Robertson, D.D.*, Edin. 1863, and *The United Presbyterian Magazine*, March 1898, p. 104.

and frolicsome lad, died at the age of twenty-one, leaving a number of verses and papers which he had scattered in the local press. The second, who ultimately succeeded to the farm, was like his father, a superior and sarcastic man, with even more literary tastes. "He would keep a book open beside him even when threshing, to glance at now and then as his father threw in the sheaves."[1] If he had aspirations after a professional career, however, he repressed them in favour of those who were younger. But the third son was just at this time leaving for his apprenticeship, to become later on a farmer in another part of the same county. Accordingly the mother's hope, that one of her children should become a scholar and a minister, could only be fulfilled in the youngest — a shy, short-sighted, soft-walking, ruddy, black-haired boy of twelve.[2] And this career must be attempted by him under new discouragements; for there was now no state stipend, and no patronage by the kindly minister of Ellon or the Tory earls, to look forward to. The father saw the case clearly, and decided that the boy ought to take to work like the others. But the mother clung the more to her desire, and for some time there were again divided counsels in

[1] "What books did he chiefly read?" I inquired. "Shakespeare, Byron, Tennyson, Cooper, Scott, Hugh Miller, Dickens," etc., was the answer. The father of all these sons knew Burns by heart, and Andrew (of whom nearly the same was true) often heard him, when in happy mood, recite poem after poem by his fireside.

[2] "As a boy," said one who knew him well, "he looked timid, but he *was* unusually firm." It is Davidson in a nutshell.

the home. And again she so far gained her point, for the father at length intimated, not approval or even assent, but bare acquiescence! She might pull her son through—if she could.

She did it—after the fashion which in educational matters has given a foremost place in the empire to Scotland, and in Scotland to the district of Aberdeen. The boy Andrew became "herd" on the farm, and each day after his work ran two miles to what may fairly be described as a hedge-school; for the teacher "had a small piece of land on which he grew corn, and in the harvest the young scholar might sometimes have been seen walking by the side of the master, who with a scythe cut his corn and at the same time heard the boy's lessons." And when "the cows went in" before the northern winter, he was promoted to more regular instruction under Mr. Hay of Tillydesk, a self-taught but vigorous parochial teacher, who to the end of his life held that he had made Andrew Davidson a scholar. But in the meantime he had to be made an undergraduate, and Hay well knew that, before he could become even that, there should be an intermediate step of the ladder. Accordingly, in 1845, the boy went for six months to the Grammar School of Aberdeen, then the great feeder of Marischal College. There, under the famous Dr. Melvin (affectionately remembered by Professor Masson and many others as old "Grim"), he was licked into the final shape of a northern student, qualified, if he could do nothing else, to make a

"version"—*i.e.* of English into Latin. For all this ascending toil was preliminary to the entrance examination for a University bursary, the competitors for which were to be drawn from many schools and parishes all around Aberdeen.

The day he came in to the Grammar School the boy had his first sight of a great city; and the peculiarly homeless feeling, which always mingles with the exultation of that experience, was increased by a curious accident. The mother had taken a little room for him, and the few things necessary to furnish it were sent in by the carrier. No part of them arrived, the whole being stolen on the road; and the lad spent his first night looking for a home in one lodging after another. Years after, the whole thing seems to have come back to him, in one of those moods when life presses upon us like a dense atmosphere, and there is left not the light and warmth, but the mere hope and promise, of an Open Door.[1] But meantime he turned to his work in his own

[1] In a sermon on "I have set before you an open door," he says—

"Christ uses the figure in a sort of absolute way. There is a door, an entrance, a way in—He does not say from where, nor in to what. In where, and in from what, our own hearts will suggest to us. For what are we men in the world,—many of us at least, men who reflect? Are we not people who for long have been walking this way and that way, pursuing all ways that seemed open to us of thought and life, but in every case finding that whatever way we took it carried us but a little distance—it suddenly stopped, and there rose up before us a wall, insurmountable and dead, with no entrance in it, no door, an absolute obstacle to further movement? Before and behind, such walls were around us, insurmountable and dead. Or we are like men in the outer darkness of night,

"faction," or desk of Melvin's class; and his mother, saying nothing at home of the lost baggage and other untoward chances, watched over him from the farm. As winter drew near she could not rest, and walked in to Aberdeen with some small present, which she gave him, wishing it were more. "Never mind, mother," he replied,—"I hae gotten the bursary." It was not much—the bursaries ran from £10 to £20 for four years. But it was enough to pay his class fees; and such a story may explain why Scottish parents and their sons (who continue to pay university fees) accepted Mr. Carnegie's subsequent gift in a different spirit from academical authorities (who merely continue to receive them). For young Davidson's bursary made university attendance possible, but not easy. During his four years at Marischal College (where Dugald Dalgetty, of Scott's *Legend of Montrose*, began of old to make the world his oyster) farm provisions were brought in to him fortnightly by his mother from Ellon; and sometimes the indomitable little woman walked the whole way, and handed the coach fare she thus saved to her student son. During

groping our way, straining our eyes to catch some rays of light streaming from an open door. Sometimes, when one comes in youth from a distant home to a great city where he is unknown and alone, he walks through the streets beholding the lighted windows, and hearing the sounds of music and joy within. The sounds but intensify his own sense of solitariness, and he is fain to hurry away to his room, lest he should have to confess to himself his own weakness. We differ from him in that we see no light and hear no sound of joy — we only dream of it and crave for it; saying, Surely there is a door out of this outer darkness? Is there not a door leading in to where there is light and joy?"

his whole undergraduate course he lived in the same attic in Gallowgate, in a house which was the stony nurse of strong men — *leonum arida nutrix.* For it belonged to the grandfather of the late eloquent Professor Elmslie, and in a lower flat lived the grandmother of W. A. Hunter, afterwards member of Parliament for Aberdeen, whose powerful book on Roman Law did much for that study in England. But the future law professor was in the meantime a child in petticoats, who crawled as often as possible into the room of the student upstairs—a student already shy to adults and passionately fond of children.

A. B. Davidson never took a foremost place at the university. But he had a fair standing during his four years in all the classes—on the average perhaps *fourth*, which was his place also among those "honourably distinguished" in the graduation of 1849. His tastes and preferences too in matters of learning were already beginning to shape themselves. A month after taking his degree he wrote to a classfellow and friend (now Dr. A. C. Cameron, secretary in Edinburgh of the Teachers' Association of Scotland): "We twa hae paidled i' the burn for nearly four years together, and I am sure you will allow, it was not always too clear or clean a puddle—especially when we began to dabble in metaphysics." His distrust of philosophy and its methods lasted to the end, and was often sarcastically expressed. He found more difficulty in making choice between the mathematical and linguistic sides. In his

first summer vacation he wrote the same friend that he found Euclid "extremely dry," and that if he had not "some Greek and Latin to learn" in the summer he would have thrown up the whole thing. As it is, he sends him "three dialogues" which he had written out (supposed to be Lucian rather than Plato). As his course went on, however, he chose to work up mathematics, stood high in that class in the prize list of spring 1848, and in November of the same year competed for the best thing Marischal College had to give—a mathematical bursary of £30 a year for two years. There is reason to think (as we shall see) that the attainment of this bursary might have had an important influence on his future course. But it was carried off by another Buchan boy, William Mair, now Dr. Mair of Earlston, who among his various distinctions has become the chief ecclesiastical lawyer of the Church of Scotland, was in 1897 Moderator of its General Assembly, and next year led that Assembly, after sixty years' delay, to take publicly the same advanced position which Mr. Robertson of Ellon had taken privately in 1843.[1] By a curious coincidence, it was for the same year, 1897, that Professor A. B. Davidson, who by that time had for a generation been the most influential of Hebrew teachers and Biblical critics in Scotland, was elected to the Moderator's chair of the other General Assembly, that of the Free Church of Scotland.

[1] See *Law of Creeds in Scotland*, 1902, pp. 100, 126.

But in his closing college session, 1848–1849, there seems to have been a doubt whether Davidson would ever be a member of General Assemblies or a student of Divinity and Hebrew at all. In one of the discourses included in this volume[1] the preacher is led (by Jeremiah's pre-natal call) to reflect on "things in our history which we cannot but consider as providential, determining our course of life," and he adds—

"Our minds were, perhaps, fixed on a certain career in life; but in order to pursue it, it was necessary that we should gain some distinction in learning, or obtain some position, *and we failed*; and the failure altered our whole career—and now we are where we are, about to enter upon a calling more sacred."

The sixty pounds of bursary would certainly have helped the young graduate in commencing any career suggested by his ambition or his surroundings. I find that he was at this time in the family of a well-known Aberdeen lawyer of that day, Mr. Garden; a family which might have done much to assist him, for the mother especially, a very able woman, took an active and kindly interest in the young tutor's plans. And, if we turn to the page already quoted from, we do not find the preacher representing the more positive influences which lead men —which perhaps led him—to study for the ministry, as startling or individual. He rather connects divine purpose with early associations and impressions. And these, too, are recalled as having been not fitful

[1] See p. 207.

merely, but in themselves formless and ineffective—not unlike those vague impulses from the Spirit of God which swept over Manoah's son when he dwelt in the camp of Dan.

"But at last the hour for decision came, as it came to Jeremiah. We stood, it may be, before a promising secular or literary career, and many things and many influences were in favour of our adopting it. But we felt certain reluctances, not very distinct, but they were there: our minds in a sort of instinctive way, rather than our wills consciously, seemed putting out their hands in another direction. And this shaped our history."

I have no doubt that the whole passage from which these quotations are taken was intended by the preacher not to reveal to others, but to recall and record for himself, his motives and general state of mind at the time when he and his friend Cameron, after graduating in spring 1849, went together to buy their Hebrew Grammars. It is characteristic of him, in describing them even to himself, to take them at their lowest valuation. At the same time we are not bound to do so. The career which was now begun was a great and influential one. The force which drove that silent ploughshare through its lifelong furrow was from the first strenuous and strong. And even the initial obstacles were serious. The farmer of Kirkhill had resolved, after a struggle, to cast in his lot with the Free Church. But that threw on him, and the few in the parish who were like-minded, some un-

expected burdens. Besides the ministry of the Church throughout Scotland, the new body was called upon to support a system of schools; for by an intolerant law, now happily abolished, all its adherents were declared incapable of being parochial teachers, or teachers (even of languages or science) in the universities. So now there was a Free Church School in Ellon; and the new Master of Arts became teacher there, instead of going to the Divinity Hall either of Aberdeen or Edinburgh. There for three and a half years he remained. It was a step aside; perhaps, in the view of his mother and others, a step back.[1] But he was not the first who has been called to turn aside for three years in order, before entering upon life, to realise the nature of life and the meaning of its call. Those very years, it has been shrewdly surmised, were "the years in which he made himself."[2] They were certainly the years in which he made himself a scholar.

In the first place, he set to and earned by examination the full Government grant—one of the highest of his year—and continued to hold it. At the same time, he was learning practically what to the end he so remarkably retained—the skill to manage as well as teach a class. But it was more important that he now made final choice of his field of work—linguistic and philological.

[1] "It is not well for men to succeed too soon. It is not a disadvantage to be unrecognised for a time. . . . It is good to mature slowly, and alone — to become at home with our own power, ourselves first of all." From Sermon on "They that wait upon the Lord."

[2] Dr. Robertson Nicoll and Professor G. A. Smith.

Besides Hebrew, he taught himself in Ellon, French, German, Dutch, Italian, and apparently Spanish; and these, with the classic tongues already acquired, gave scope as well as stimulus to his power of philological and philosophical research. Even in Hebrew his interest was first awakened (as he told Professor Skinner of Cambridge) at this time, and that in a simple way and on the grammatical side, "by a volume of T. Kerchever Arnold which came into his hands,"—no doubt Arnold's *First Hebrew Book*, published in 1851. Such an accident, however, directed rather than originated the impulse of one who was a born grammarian and teacher; and those who knew him at the time agree that if Davidson at all learned to teach, it was from Melvin. He possessed, says the Rev. Alexander Yule, "Melvin's two general characteristics — extreme accuracy, and the power of making his pupils think his own subject of vast importance." Principal Donaldson of St. Andrews, Davidson's contemporary at both Grammar School and College, points particularly to his friend's early conviction, that the best method was to practise the learner in translating from English into Hebrew. "He adopted this method afterwards in his classes and embodied it in his grammar; but his belief in it was created by his experience in the Grammar School. Melvin taught Latin in this way in a masterly manner, and with striking advantage to the development of the whole mind. Davidson knew Arnold's books well; but it was the influence of Melvin that was paramount."

The step aside had already become a step forward, and one in the exact line of the future. The study of Hebrew may be supposed, indeed, to have been a clear pledge given to his future profession. But if he had chosen a profession at all, it was as yet only provisionally. In Scotland, preaching and pastorate are the main part—in the ordinary case the whole—of the ministry of the Church; and Davidson never believed that he was called to either. We shall see this at a later stage. But in the meantime these difficulties, and perhaps graver ones, became manifest to his mother. She was probably the only person with whom throughout his life he was really confidential. But she was also the one who could read him, in cases when he shrank from confidence even with her. It is not remembered that she sympathised with his disappointment as to the mathematical bursary. She may have counted that a blessing in disguise. And it is well known that, after he came back to Ellon, she was in some trouble as to her son's plans—probably his new philological studies. They might well have seemed hostile to the concentration of his mind on divinity. But if so, those very studies, as they went on under her intelligent eye, restored her faith in his future. For before he left Ellon, in the end of 1852, his mother was heard to say, that "the day will come when Andrew will be in a chair."

What the mother prophesied (but only to her own family), the son must have now regarded as one of the possibilities of the future. How precarious such

a mere possibility was, he was at all times the last man to forget. Yet the prospect, precarious as well as postponed, may have strengthened the lad in taking his next step. For in November 1852 he entered the New College, as the Divinity Hall of the Free Church in Edinburgh had come to be called, from its equipment of other and preparatory classes. The unfailing local patriotism of Aberdeen had endowed a Divinity Hall there also, but the professorships were not in the meantime filled up. Dr. Chalmers, the first head of the Edinburgh Hall, was dead. His successor, however, Dr. William Cunningham, had been all along the most powerful theologian in Scotland, and two of the other professors appealed to the young linguist, for Dr. Guthrie had hailed them in the Disruption Assembly as men who could "talk their way to the wall of China." With this institution in Edinburgh, A. B. Davidson was henceforth to be associated as student and as teacher; and that, with scarcely a break, to the close of life. In 1856 he completed the four years' theological course which the Scottish Church, more exacting than that of England, ordinarily imposes on her ministers after they have passed through the previous curriculum of Arts (which had extended to four years more). And in the spring or summer of that year he became *a preacher*: in the technical language of his country, a licentiate or probationer, *i.e.*, one licensed by the Presbytery to preach on probation with a view to more permanent ministry

if called by a particular congregation to be their pastor. He was never so called, but during two years he preached occasionally throughout the country, taking charge for some time of a vacancy at Craigmill in Perthshire, and for six months acting as assistant to Dr. Macgillvray of Gilcomston Free Church in Aberdeen. During these two years, however, the Edinburgh men had come to see—what had been clear to students there, and above all to Davidson, at an earlier date—that the distinguished Professor of Hebrew in the New College taught his students everything but Hebrew, and must have an assistant who should be largely *locum tenens*. Professors and students alike had cast their eyes upon Davidson as the man for the work, and before the winter session of 1858 the College authorities of the Free Church appointed him tutor or assistant. And now his life-work was found. From the first he had to take the half and sometimes the whole of the teaching of Hebrew in the class every winter. And in the long vacations he made his way, one year to the Continent to work under Ewald (whose grammar he already prized above all other Hebrew treatises), and another year later on to Syria, to study Arabic on Eastern soil. But in 1862, urged and advised by his friends Bayne and Donaldson, he published his *Commentary on Job*, a never-finished production, dealing with only one-third part of that book. But it is one which experts have held to be "the first really scientific commentary on the Old

Testament in the English language,"[1] and we shall find it of some interest in relation to his sermons. It had, at all events, the anticipated effect of drawing the eyes of his Church—a body which has usually been eager to advance the interests of sacred learning—to the young assistant in Edinburgh; and in 1863 the General Assembly appointed him full professor there "of Oriental Languages"; or, as the chair is now fully and officially described, "Old Testament Language and Literature, including Textual Criticism, Introduction, Exegesis, and Old Testament Theology."

The few years of Dr. Davidson's early career summed up in last paragraph, from his entering the New College to his return to it as assistant and as professor, are for our purposes the most important of his whole life. There are not many of his friends, however, whose recollections go back so far as his earliest residence in Edinburgh. Always shy, he enjoyed society at this period of his life more than afterwards, and was grateful to those who relieved him from outward solitariness and inward reserve. But, as it happens, the family circles in which the young student was welcomed as a guest are now very much dispersed. And, even as a student among students, while respected for attainments far above the average, Davidson was not well known or widely influential. The barrier of shyness an intelligently sympathetic man, and still more a woman, could in a *tête-à-tête* easily break through.

[1] Professor George Adam Smith.

But it was strong enough to prevent himself from breaking out—breaking out, at least, into a mob of young men rejoicing in their youth, and choosing their natural leaders. We have no record, for example, of his having been intimate with A. B. Bruce, who was nearly his contemporary at college, as afterwards in memorable professorial work, and who, as a student in Edinburgh, was an embodiment of our rough Scottish *Burschenherrlichkeit.* When Davidson did come out of his shell he naturally turned for companions to those who, like himself, had studied at Aberdeen; and in Edinburgh, as in every other spot of earth, they were powerfully represented. One of his chief friends in this early Edinburgh time was Dr. Peter Bayne, soon after editor of *The Witness*, and subsequently the biographer of Hugh Miller, and perhaps the best historian of the Free Church. Bayne's generous, open, and aspiring nature attracted young men to himself and to the books—still worth reading—in which he embodied his message to them. Unfortunately, his long and strenuously useful life ended in London without leaving relics of this particular friendship.[1] But

[1] There are no letters, that is. But Dr. Bayne's poem of "Jezebel" (for he was also a poet), published so early as 1872, has always seemed to me a remarkable one, and it must have had relations to the life we trace. In it the Sidonian queen is described as the representative, among her husband's puritanic people, of culture and toleration all round, and as driven to severity only by their resolute refusal to allow a conformity in which the altars of Jehovah and of Baal should smoke side by side. All readers of Knox will find in the poem a veiled study of Scottish

a third comrade in it, both at Grammar School and University, was the present Principal Donaldson of St. Andrews. And his recollections, from a point outside the Divinity Hall, are only surpassed by those of lifelong friends who were then inside it, — men such as Mr. Duguid of New Machar, who followed Davidson from Ellon to Edinburgh, and Mr. Yule of Melbourne, who lived with him in Castle Street lodgings.

Davidson was animated by the atmosphere, intellectual and moral, of the New College; and during the four years of his attendance he seems to me to have not only preserved, but steadily increased, his evangelical fervour, and to have deepened his foundations of belief. But having now come face to face with the responsibilities imposed by the Church upon the students and ministers, he felt keenly the gratuitous difficulties which the sluggishness of the time threw in the way of both. At that period the historic origin of the Bible, as a literature built up progressively at sundry times and in divers manners, was too much forgotten; and the varying claims of its respective parts, known even then to our students and teachers, were smothered under the popular fiction of an equal and verbal inspiration of all. In Davidson's mind this question naturally connected itself with the practical

history; and a far more successful defence of the Queen or Scots might be made on this line than some which have been attempted. If this was not Mary's own idea, it was probably that of her great adviser, Maitland of Lethington, as it was undoubtedly a century later of Sir George Mackenzie, the "Bloody Advocate."

one—how the Bible and Bible study should be dealt with by the interpreter. He was not without his difficulties too on other points of theology—on predestination, as taught by his Church, and hyper-Calvinism, as held by some influential members of it. All those matters "perplexed and irritated him," especially in connexion with the creed and its subscription. For the Westminster Confession, our relation to which has recently been adjusted by Presbyterianism on both sides of the Atlantic, had at that date been unrevised for two hundred years; and Davidson found men reduced to argue that its moral authority was increased, rather than diminished or destroyed, by so protracted a neglect. Professor Davidson's cautious and self-contained attitude on such public questions in later years is well known. In the freedom of unofficial youth he was more outspoken, but not even then one-sided. Principal Donaldson, who says he was then "strongly Evangelical," ascribes to him at the same date—

"A strange power of seeing both sides of a question with great intensity in periods of time immediately succeeding each other. We could play on this feature of his character. We could rouse him to the warmest defence of the straitest orthodoxy by attacking the orthodox, and a short time after he would be equally decided in behalf of freedom of thought, if we abused Schleiermacher or other Germans."

The hope of an academic union of freedom with faith

was not extinguished as Davidson became acquainted with the heads of his Divinity Hall. With Principal William Cunningham, in particular, "Davidson and I," says Principal Donaldson, "used to have private talks. He allowed us to broach any theories, and discussed them with great liberality, so as to astonish us," being in fact a man whose masculine character and intellect impressed themselves upon his Church's history long after he had himself passed away.[1] But Cunningham was characteristically a large-minded dogmatist and debater, and these were not the qualities of which his young student from Buchan had now need. Indeed, of all the eminent Scotchmen of the previous generation who survived into Professor Davidson's youth, I do not find any—with one exception—who had much influence upon him. He got more from the college and his fellow-students generally; and while he was at no time of his life an incessant worker, he was now immersed in studies which he enjoyed, and he was able deliberately to make up his mind on the larger questions which lay before him.

The one man whom Davidson met who did greatly influence him seems to have been Dr. John Duncan, then his master, and afterwards his colleague, in the chair of Hebrew. This connexion has been too much forgotten. The only influence of a great man which some recognise is that which draws others to imitate or

[1] See the latter half of his biography (1871), which is by Robert Rainy, D.D., and contains much unconscious prophecy.

at least to follow him. But there is an influence of reaction as well as of attraction; and when these act *together* upon a strong nature—a nature independent as well as appreciative—the result may be very powerful. Now Davidson had a central and too solitary independence of soul, and he seems never to have followed any human being. But he had also faculties of true appreciation. And Duncan—besides being the man by reference to whom Davidson was now called upon to mould his own future—was in many respects the greatest man, and certainly the most extraordinary man, whom he had ever met.

As we look up the later slope of the nineteenth century, two Edinburgh figures stand out on its central ridge as *thinkers*. One is Sir William Hamilton, the collapse of whose prematurely compacted system of philosophy must not make us forget his amazing personal power over the youthful mind. But another, and a greater, was John Duncan. "I am"—so he defined himself — "a philosophical sceptic, who have taken refuge in theology." But his philosophy, even when it had been atheistic, could never escape from the attraction of the idea of God, and his later theological refuge was hung around with metaphysical mist and cloudland. On both sides he was at this very time at the summit of his astonishing conversational powers. The years 1859 and 1860, during the summers of which Professor Knight of St. Andrews gleaned from the old man the materials for his noble volume of *Colloquia*

Peripatetica,[1] found Davidson each winter in close conjunction with his professor, of whose junior Hebrew class he had by this time taken over the whole burden. "To hear Duncan talk in Davidson's rooms was a thing never to be forgotten," writes the friend who shared those rooms, though he now recalls it after the lapse of forty years, and walks—

"By the long wash of Australasian seas."

Who, indeed, that ever knew the Rabbi could forget him! With his long beard and flowing skirts, his lifted finger and glittering eye, his archaic language and supra-mundane thinking, he looked half Ancient Mariner and half Wandering Jew, and wholly a being of another sphere. And yet he was compact of the kindly clay of Aberdeen. The sickly child of a Seceder shoemaker, he was early heard to pray, "O that God would spare me till I get on the red cloakie!" That red cloak, the mark of the northern undergraduate, he came to wear like Davidson at Marischal College. But he then plunged through metaphysic into Spinoza, and when Dr. Mearns, a fine old Moderate, convinced him that there was a God, "I danced on the Brig o' Dee with delight, though I had fear that He would damn me." Later on came his conversion, and his "second conversion," and a saintliness much impaired in his own view by too frequent absence of mind and too passionate

[1] *Colloquia Peripatetica*: *Notes of Conversations with the late John Duncan, LL.D.* Fifth edition, with Biographical Sketch. By Professor Knight. Edinburgh: David Douglas.

"lust of linguistic," and by an absolute incapacity to follow out the class-lesson for the day when a big thought came trailing clouds of glory across his mental vision.

Great as Duncan was in speculation and in learning, in Scripture and in scholasticism, he was before all a theologian. Even in his Hebrew class he sought to utter truth as a supernatural whole, more as it may be seen *a parte Dei*, than as it was fragmentarily revealed to the eyes of men struggling upwards in the days of old. It was impossible to expect that such a nature as his should do otherwise, at least after one experience which it passed through. Strangely enough, it was not to Knight or Davidson, or any of his class, but to the present writer (then a young graduate and law student), that the old man confided the crisis of his youth. It had happened when he was no longer a Spinozist; but his theism had lost its glow, and his moral character was crumbling to pieces, and to his Aberdeen friend David Brown, who walked backwards and forwards with him for two hours one night under the bridge of Union Street, he said passionately: "*The doctrines* I can't and won't believe." Next night he went to a house where a well-known Swiss pastor was guest.

"Malan came and touched me on the shoulder and said, 'They tell me you are a very learned man. What do you know?' I answered rather petulantly, 'I know nothing!' 'Well,' said he, 'I believe that is not exactly

what a Christian says. He does not say absolutely, I know nothing. *I* know Him that is true.' . . . At last in our talk I happened to be quoting a text. He started forward and said, 'See! you have the Word of God in your mouth!' It passed through me like electricity—the great thought that God meant man to know His mind: God—His Word—in my very mouth. It was, I believe, the seed of all I have, if I have anything, to this hour. . . . That day, as I sat down to study and took my pen in my hand, I became suddenly the passive recipient of all the truths which I had heard and been taught in my childhood. I sat there unmoving for hours, and they came and preached themselves to me. There was now no investigation such as I had desired, but presentation of the truth to me passive. And I felt, sitting there, as if in that hour I had got matter for sermons for a lifetime."[1]

With all truth thus let down from above as in one sheet, it was the wisdom of the recipient—even when the recipient was a great theosophist—to be through life responsive and obedient to the heavenly vision. And to the end Duncan was faithful to the supreme point of view from which he now beheld the universe—though his universe changed continually with shifting clouds of speculation, and occasionally with shocks of personal experience. But in his Hebrew class he discoursed from the fulness of Christian doctrine, and all his "exegesis" of the prophets was of their own higher kind, searching

[1] Taken down from Duncan, and corrected by him, in 1862.

what the Spirit of Christ that was in them pointed forward to, in a world still unborn and of a King who was yet to be. The result was that he taught no Hebrew, and little of the Old Testament as the Old Testament was historically delivered. And Davidson, called in at first to supply the former defect, had to face the problem raised by the latter.

Vast as his reverence for Duncan was,[1] Davidson neither could nor would take the same line. And he saw, apparently from the first, that another line was open. For him the historical delivery of the Old Testament was authoritative as truly as the contents; and the divine meaning was not to be ascertained without a critical knowledge of the original speakers and circumstances. Upon that basis, modest and humble though it was, great doctrinal superstructures might be raised. But the critical, which is the divine, basis of fact must first be laid. He put it that—

"Criticism is the effort of exegesis to be historical. The

[1] In a lecture, delivered while Duncan was still living, Professor Davidson thus referred to his senior colleague: "Often have we seen, when on some deep question our dimmer minds were filled with struggling feelings, that refused to combine or to subside, how he would suddenly shoot some strong thought, like a spark of electric light, into the solution, and straightway the problem fell into order and crystallised in purity. And oftentimes I at least, when smitten with impatience under some aspect of a biblical truth that seemed to shock the higher instincts of the soul, have felt how he would rise before me, laden with all the treasures, and softened by all the chastisements, of those who think and preach a reverent reserve—would rise before me, with a depth of experience that put my superficial discontent to shame."

effort can never be more than partially successful. But . . . it gives us the right idea of Scripture, which is the reflection of the presence of the living God in human history."

His book on *Job* was published in the end of 1862, while he was still merely tutor and assistant to the professor, and it seems to have been commenced even before he filled that office. In some places it hesitates on the duty of going down to the original facts; and, no doubt partly for that reason, Davidson never cared to revert to it or complete it. Yet when he comes to deal with the central and significant figure of the drama, he puts his idea with much beauty. Taking up the utterance, "I know that my redeemer liveth," he says—

"Job perhaps yet does not grasp the general principle of retribution, he only feels that *he* must yet be cleared. And thus it is that truth is ever won. We reach it in personal conflict. A nation never reaches a truth; a man does, and it becomes a national inheritance. Religion is so essentially a personal thing, a matter between two, that all its truths are personal truths; and when in its ultimate extremity a soul grasps a truth as a necessity, as the only solution morality and law can accept, thousands of other souls in the same straits, struggling and sinking, stretch out their hands and make their own this means of escape. . . . Of course we are laying down no theory of revelation here. For God seems to have availed Himself, in communicating truth, of every mode and channel through which the mind is capable of

receiving truth: sometimes speaking directly to the outward sensuous ear, as in the law; sometimes projecting gigantic visions before the inward eye of the sleeping or waking seer, as in prophecy; and sometimes laying His finger directly on the human heart, and causing it to utter, out of its own immediate awe and anguish, the sublimest revelations, as in Job. . . . There has been too much tendency to dissever Revelation from any relation to the human mind in its origin, and to the men of its immediate time in its application. We have been too apt to look at it as coming from heaven like a meteoric stone, amazing to the spectators, but to be analysed and used only by a subsequent era. Scripture is not so, it comes rather like the rain, blessing the immediate earth and man where it falls, and falling primarily for this purpose; yet not by this exhausted, but sliding down and becoming perennial springs, to flow and be drunk at by us, and all generations for ever."

We have thus brought Professor Davidson to the threshold of his life-work, and have found that he had already laid down the lines on which it was from first to last built up. And I now gladly leave it to some one among his powerful and accomplished scholars, to record his course and estimate his influence as theologian and critic. That task, whenever it is undertaken, will require a knowledge of the developments of theology in general during the last fifty years, as well as some appreciation of the deeper currents of our own religious

history during the same time. I am, of course, equally incapable of dealing with the professor's management of his class. Many have testified to his power in conducting it: few have described how it was done. A brilliant writer, however, has given so vividly one aspect of the two years' work in that room, and that from the inside, that I am tempted to reproduce it.[1] The earlier and amusing part of the passage will at least recall to outsiders who knew Professor Davidson the crisp and sub-sarcastic edge of much of his usual talk. And the last paragraph brings up some points with which we have yet to deal—

"A portrait of a great scholar ought always to be in black and white. Dr. Davidson in his class-room must be etched with the keenest needle, bitten in with the most mordant acid. Strange things happen in that class. Conceit becomes attenuated there, like a snow-man under the sun of March. The daring young man who made the brilliant maiden speech in the Theological Society has been asked if he has yet possessed himself of a Hebrew Lexicon. 'Almost any one will do—if you use it,' says the professor pointedly. The genius who, when asked for the root of an irregular verb, gives confidently the regular form, having omitted the slight formality of consulting his dictionary as savouring of supererogation, is discouraged thus, 'Well, sir, that would have been a good suggestion about five thousand years ago, but I'm a little afraid it's too late now!' In a while the class begins to realise its professor, and, incidentally, to know itself. It is the latter species of learning that Dr. Davidson encourages. 'If there is any time when young men ought *not* to read their

[1] "Pen-Portrait" in *Christian Leader* (now *Weekly Leader*), 3rd March 1892.

English Bibles, it's when they are translating the Hebrew one!' he says to a gentleman whose fluency with the authorised version of the most noble King James is balanced by the paralysis of his utterance when called upon to parse the individual vocables. 'You have the words all right,' he tells another stammerer; 'it's a pity that the verbs and nouns are so very confusing.' The professor has no pity for the shirkers; but his tenderness for those who are doing their best under adverse circumstances is large-hearted and catholic. The writer of verses is rather sharply handled, on account of his weakness, till the professor finds out by accident that he is tied to newspaper work till three o'clock in the morning,—after this discovery he has many privileges. But if the professor should think that want of preparation proceeds from indolence or want of application, an epigrammatic whip-lash will dart out—a phrase perhaps not five words long which will yet sting like a scorpion's tail.

"'Mr. M'Allister,' says the professor.

"'Not prepared!' answers that gentleman unabashed. (It is in the early days of the session.)

"For other two successive days the same answer is given, and the professorial frown deepens each day. The thunder-clouds are brooding low. On the fourth day, without so much as opening his roll, Mr. M'Allister is called once more.

"'I am not prepared to-day, sir,' says the youth.

"'*To-day*, Mr. M'Allister, TO-DAY!' and the accent is sufficient to drive home the sarcasm through a front of brass.

"Thus it is in the junior class. There the men are in training, and by the second year they are more able to listen to the prelections of their teacher with some appreciation. Lecture days are great days in the classroom high up among the chimney pots. Some other professors' classes used to be thinner on these days. Grey heads of venerable fathers in the faith were there, some tolerant of new things, some with nostrils in the air for a sniff of heresy. No student was absent on

those high days. The professor entered in the midst of a hush. The brief chiselled phrase of the introductory prayer brought us face to face with the Eternities. The speaker opened his manuscript—no more need to call the roll than for Kidd to do so at the two o'clock dinner hour. Now he was laying down the lines of a great lecture. Memorable sentences, memory-scorching epithets flashed hither and thither. Amos the herdsman came out from among his sheep-cotes and stood before us: Jonah tried to play hide and seek with his Maker and became henceforth a type of all our hearts. The first glimpse of latent spiritual meanings refreshed us while we wondered. We breathed an ampler ether, a serener air. Some of us felt that our chosen life-work had now new possibilities."

In this formidably attractive chair Professor Davidson sat for almost forty years. During seven of these he was junior colleague to Dr. Duncan, till the death of the latter in 1870. For thirty years he was sole professor, and for the last two years of his life he was in turn senior colleague. For the colleges of two Churches were now at last happily united, in the union of the Churches themselves in 1900 into the United Free Church of Scotland. During most of that time his residence in Edinburgh was separated from the Old Town only by the breadth of The Meadows; but towards the close of the century he took a house near to the Braid Valley. He was never married; but a favourite niece kept house for him for some years, and his latest days were brightened by her return, a widow with a young family, to his new home. The long vacations of the Scottish professoriate were thoroughly enjoyed

by one who had never quite worked out his vein of occasional indolence, and he sometimes played golf even in mid-winter. His Hebrew Grammar meantime ran on into its 17th edition; the wise importunity of friends forced from him some smaller works; and his latest years were given to *The Bible Dictionary*. He preached half a dozen times in the year; but you had to follow him to small churches in remote parts of Edinburgh, or to the induction of his students in parishes far away. As member of the Revision Committee on the Old Testament he was highly appreciated in London, and is understood to have done admirable work. As years wore on he became LL.D. (Aberdeen), D.D. (Edinburgh and Glasgow), and Litt.D. (Cambridge). He had to decline the invitation of the University of St. Andrews, and of his old friend Principal Donaldson, to be their Gifford lecturer. Five years before his death, however, he paused and hesitated in presence of nomination, by the large selecting body of the Free Church, to be Moderator of its next General Assembly, of 1897. Professor Davidson was wholly non-ecclesiastical; and his selection as Moderator was thus a pure honour, intended to express the gratitude of a new generation for his lifetime of work. An absolute medical prohibition put an end to this prospect. But on two other occasions—one the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Theological Society of the New College, and again at the banquet which closed the memorable Church Union meetings of the

last year of the century, the same gratitude found overflowing expression. At both meetings the central figure was understood to be his friend, Principal Rainy, now for many years the leading churchman in Scotland. But whenever the New College of Edinburgh was mentioned, Dr. Davidson, by this time the senior professor of its senate, and again surrounded by the enthusiasm of his former pupils, seemed almost to monopolise the applause. And, amid all such incidents, his work in study and his work in class went steadily on, hour by hour and day by day, till work and life were suddenly closed by spasm of the heart, on the morning of Sunday, the 26th January 1902.

So far, we have touched upon the external and professional life of Dr. Davidson. But it may be desirable to look a little more closely at the man himself. And it is curious that this should be pressed upon us especially by his sermons. For Davidson was a preacher in spite of himself. So late as the early Seventies he had still difficulty (as the writer had occasion to know) in admitting that the pulpit was even part of his vocation. Yet notwithstanding this inward difficulty—partly, we may see reason to think, because of it—he was a most powerful preacher. And whatever might be said of his professorial work, his preaching was closely connected with the man. Though each particular sermon was clean from the smallest speck of egotism, no intelligent

auditor went away without feeling that at some point of it a window had been opened into the breast of the speaker. And if we are to characterise in this respect the little pile of manuscript sermons which he has left behind, I can only say that they seem to me suffused and saturated with autobiography.

Davidson was a preacher *malgré lui.* "He did not like preaching," says Principal Donaldson, speaking of the time before he was a professor. "He always looked forward to it with shrinking," says another friend. Some of the reasons were obvious. To the end of his life he was as shy as a girl, and to harangue an assemblage of twenty people cost him a strong nervous effort. And the effort was injurious as well as painful. At the very time when he was officiating on Sundays as a new-made licentiate, he would suddenly stop in his Monday walk with the last-quoted friend, put his hand to his breast, and hurry home, useless for the day from palpitation of the heart. And even in later life, and in the small and quiet churches which he selected, he felt the same nervous strain—felt it, down to the last sermons preached in Gullane and Rothesay the summer before his death. But the strain was more than bodily or nervous. It was emotional as well; and in the case of Professor Davidson it went deeper than that reluctance to address others, especially on matters of personal concern, which dominates many of the best of men. It ran down, I think, to a contrast in his inner nature, which sometimes grew to extreme conflict or tension.

On the one hand, far below the mere superficial shyness there was a central solitariness or reserve. And that seemed connected with an early and deep sense of the limitation and hollowness of the world around, and with a persistent distrust both of it and *of himself*. In his outspoken student days this last found freer utterance.[1] Later on, having chosen a high path of work and a narrow path of faith, he denied himself the relief of words for his wayward moods. But the pent-up reserve persisted, and in middle life hardened into a sort of shell, which may sometimes have defended him from others, but always pressed in upon himself. Hence the "aloofness"[2] which separated him even in his class from the most sympathetic students, the "elusiveness"[3] that clung to his personality when you met him outside, the loneliness and seclusion of spirit which made a "splendid solitude of his life,"[4] and the sense that after all this has been said of him, there is still "something enigmatic and unresolved."[5] Hence, too, the kindly sarcasm which was never far from his lips, for it took origin not so much in the aggression or awkwardness

[1] Principal Donaldson says that Davidson, when at college in Edinburgh, was "strongly evangelical," and was "capable of steadfast friendship." And yet he had one peculiarity that seemed to disguise both qualities. "The peculiarity was, that he seemed to distrust himself, and was not sure that his affection for his friends would continue, or that his opinions would remain the same, even substantially, on the great points of religion. But this," the Principal says again, "was mere seeming." It was a seeming, however, that went deep.

[2] Professor Martin.

[3] Professor John Skinner.

[4] Professor G. A. Smith.

[5] Dr. Robertson Nicoll.

of others, as in his own sense of the irony of existence and the emptiness of life.[1] He was always more or less a spirit in prison.

But he never acquiesced in that fate, and he made appeal to Him who has the keys at His girdle. Under the hard shell of his Aberdeen nature there was—what within that nature we other Scotsmen have so often found—a tenderness warm and true. He lived without wife or child, and missed the great appointed avenues by which a heavenly love makes channels through our earthly life. But you never met him, even casually, without a certain wistfulness looking out upon you from his observant silence or restrained speech—a wistfulness which was tell-tale of the large heart within. And in the meantime he was pleasant and courteous to all he met, and bright and glancing, though occasionally also taciturn, in conversation. "He was loving and lovable; he loved children and liked dogs; he was kindest to his humblest friends";[2] and when I spent ten days with him in Rome we continually lost him in the Corso, for our comrade had stopped to pat the cheek and follow the steps of some rosy peasant boy from the Campagna. His passion for all young life was indeed something extraordinary. Those who saw him at what seemed to be the deathbed of a niece, and again of a grand-niece, feared for his reason;

[1] And it was "in large part but the defensive armour with which an unusually kind heart protected itself."—Principal Harper.

[2] The Rev. Alex. Yule.

as, on the other hand, the death of his mother at the age of eighty-six nearly overwhelmed him. And the more distant griefs of the world, which a solitary and studious life so easily escapes, he took up in the priesthood of a sympathetic imagination. In the summer of 1888 Dr. Webster Thomson of Aberdeen and he were preaching at the reopening of a country church, and his friend's words in the evening led Davidson afterwards, as they walked together in the manse garden, to be communicative[1] on matters of personal experience. "Do you ever," he asked, "without any special reason for grief, fall into uncontrollable weeping?" Then after a pause he added, "Just the other day that came upon me in great strength. I was alone; and there came such a sense of the mystery, the uncertainty, the loneliness, the pathos of life, that I was for a long time shaken with sobs which I was unable to control." Nor was this a recent or isolated experience. More than once he had told an earlier intimate (Mr. Duguid) of "paroxysms of emotional upheaval which he had in secret." His friend wondered "whether some great crushing cross had at any time in his life been laid on him of which I knew nothing. I felt that I could not venture to ask about it." But the explanation is rather that which Mr. Duguid him-

[1] No man was more unlike himself on this point than Davidson was *at times*. An Aberdeen friend of forty years ago, now the Rev. Thomas Grant of Tain, found occasion to say, "When you get near to him, he allows himself to get near to you."

self adds: "He was a singularly lovable man;[1] and he had a tenderness and a depth of emotional feeling which few knew of." "When I look on the world," he once said, "it is not the sin that strikes me first, it is the mass of suffering." And on these occasions of inward explosion and upheaval, the tears seem to have flowed for no private disappointment or personal sorrow. They sprang from another source—from the cruel generalisations upon life of those too penetrating eyes —that young men "waste their years in trying to know what to do," and old men in "going back to youth to replenish from its fountain the sinking cisterns of their age"; that the world "has never got their best even from the greatest of its children"; that fate is envious, and life a defeated joy, and the whole creation in pain together—*sunt lacrymæ rerum!*

A fervent and almost feminine soul, imprisoned in such inward bonds, and compassed with these "long desolations" of the world, had from the first its only refuge in the Most High. All the sermons which follow will be found variations upon his own utterance, that "whatever be the outside of our lives, the inside is God."[2]

[1] Mr. Duguid says elsewhere, "I never met a more gentle, affectionate friend. He would put himself to any trouble for one—do the kindest things, and in the most hidden way."

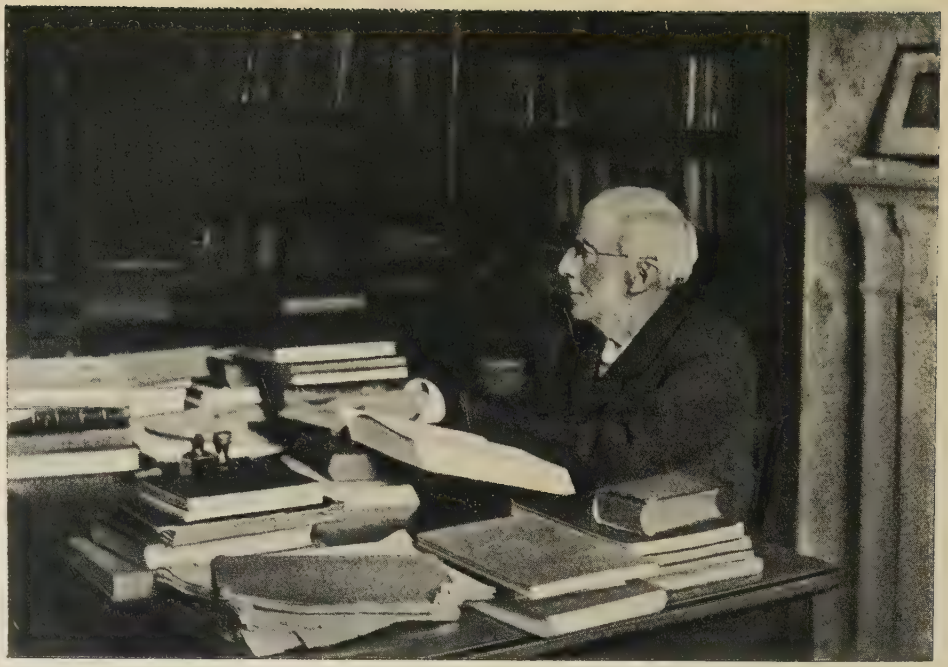
[2] In this like his own prophets. "He once said that 'the prophets were terribly one-idea'd men'—the idea being that 'Jehovah had done or was going to do something'; and he frequently asserted that the message of the whole Old Testament might be summed up in one word—God."—Professor G. A. Smith, D.D., in *Union Magazine*, May 1902.

And yet no one of them is "subjective." The faith which they demand always goes out, sometimes not knowing too well whither, but with an objective venturousness or heroism. And always in these discourses it is in response to an authoritative call—the broad call which comes to all men, or the special call which individualises the life of each, in either case a call which is to be regarded as "not an evolution of His purpose, but a revelation of His heart." But the personal aspect of religion, as communion with a Divine Being, we must take from Davidson's pen, as given in the Introduction to his *Job* of 1862, and therefore at the very time when his earlier sermons also were being sketched. The passage is remarkable, as showing that a man who disbelieved in his own preaching gifts had already some of the requisites for the broadest and most effective popularity. But it is impossible to read it without deeper feelings also being stirred.

"Job is a religious poem, not a philosophic nor a moral poem. Its theme is religion—the relation between the human and the Divine spirit: the attitude of the human soul to God. Job in all his utterances starts from himself, from his own individual experience, and not from any outward aspect which the world or men presented. He at times includes others, even all mankind, in his misery and trial; he had heard of their straits and sorrows too, and in his misery he recalls all he had heard, and, gathering up and combining

fragments and shadows, he rears at times a fabric of tremendous horror commensurate with the race. But his position is properly personal at first; he has not philosophic view; what draws his attention to God and His general relation to the world is his own case. A jar has occurred there, a dislocation and displacement in his own relation to God. He had formerly been at peace with God: suddenly, whether consciously, or through a single step of reasoning—his sufferings—he beholds God in anger with him, plaguing and tormenting him, hunting him ruthlessly down. He is consciously estranged, and therefore miserable. He knows not why he has lost God, but he has lost Him; his want of knowledge confuses him, and renders him more miserable. God is assailing him—that is fearful; He makes the assault amidst storm and darkness—that augments the terror. The groundwork of the whole poem is this attitude of the man's soul to God, and of God to it. Hence the greater portion of the poem is monologue, or speech to One absent and obstinately refusing to hear. The friends are present, but their presence is subordinate. Their shallowness occasionally irritates and provokes a sarcasm; their persevering attempts at consolation sometimes increase the solitude and wretchedness of the sufferer, and he pathetically chides their garrulous hardness, but they are too insignificant to detain him; he has another to deal with; their words form but starting-points for the soul to begin from and go through its wondrous

exercises. Like one sick, who has been drawn into half-consciousness by the entrance of some visitor, and utters a few words of seeming sense, but straight relapses, and wanders again and soliloquises with himself, or speaks to some absent person whom the spirit deems near, Job is ever drawn into consciousness and contact with the friends; but speedily he turns round, and they vanish from his sight; he is away busy with another and a greater, remonstrating with Him, chiding with Him; his eye dropping to Him; pleading his former relation of love to Him; seeking to startle Him with the probable consequences of his treatment; calling passionately that He would come and solve the mystery of his sorrows; sinking into hopelessness when He refuses to appear, or answer or acknowledge that He heard him; apparently provoked by this obstinate silence, and hurling reproachful and indignant words at Him for His cowardice in using His omnipotent power to crush a moth; in terms violent and almost blasphemous citing Him, the omnipotent God, to answer at the bar of an outraged and injured man; looking before and behind and about him, and proclaiming all in earth and heaven to be impenetrable darkness; and yet again, in the midst of all this darkness and confusion, groping his way back to Him, like a child who has fled in tears and anger from a chastening father, sure that He is but simulating, that He is still his Redeemer, and will yet show Himself to be, will yet return to save him and take him



19TH OCTOBER 1901.

to His heart, will yearn over the work of His hands: and finally, when all this anticipation comes true, restored and blessed, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

One thing is to be noted here. We have seen how sensitive Davidson was in his own soul to "the riddle of the painful earth," the problem of persistent evil and triumphant wrong, and a silent Heaven above. It might well have seemed that in the book of Scripture which he now took up he had found merely another utterance of this Sphinx-like question—a general treatment of a general and world-wide issue, such as oppressed the great Ecclesiast, and a more plaintive poet in Esdras. But he will have nothing to do with such abstract philosophising. Job is for him no broad drama, no canvas filled from marge to marge with the storied struggle of humanity. He sees in it only a personal crisis and a spiritual history, like that of the one Asaph whom we remember among many psalms, or of him who wrestled with the Wrestler by the Jabbok. And here again he separates himself in preaching, as in his lifelong work of tuition, from another and perhaps a greater type of man, that of Pascal in recent ages, and of Rabbi Duncan in his own. For Davidson was in no sense "a philosophical sceptic, who had taken refuge in theology." If he is to be defined in terms such as these at all, he was a born sceptic who took refuge in God.

And with such a word it may be well to bring to a

close this in every way imperfect chapter of biography. For his own view of seeking that refuge, — as not a blind or arbitrary act, but one which is never without warrant, and responds to an authoritative call, —must be gathered from the pages that follow. And his experience of it (like that of his own Old Testament believers who saw promises afar off and embraced them) was perhaps less securely judged in mid-conflict by himself, than it must be by survivors in the light of a closing day. For that closing day threw a reconciling flush over his public and private life. Upon his sudden death the praises of the wise and good rained round his bier;[1] and when a phalanx of scholars bore him to where he lies in the Grange

[1] Among pulpit and other utterances, the following :—Dr. Ross Taylor, *Scotsman*, 27th January 1902; Professor Martin, D.D., and C. A. Salmond, D.D., *Scotsman*, 3rd February; Professor Cowan, D.D., in Aberdeen University Chapel; Mr. A. H. Reid of Ellon, Mr. C. H. Todd and Mr. A. D. Donaldson of Aberdeen, all in *Aberdeen Free Press*, 3rd February; Principal Rainy, at the close of the New College session 1892; Principal Salmond and others in the United Free Presbytery of Aberdeen, *Aberdeen Free Press*, 4th February 1902; Principal Harper, D.D., in the Theological Hall, St. Andrew's College, Sydney, *Watchman*, 22nd March 1892 (and in *British Weekly*); and Mr. James Croskery and Mr. J. A. Campbell, in Belfast *Witness*, 7th February 1902.

Of tributes in print I note :—Professor Paterson, D.D., *Scotsman*, 27th January; Dr. John Watson, Professor Driver, D.D., Professor Stalker, D.D., Professor Margoliouth, D.D., Professor Bennett, D.D., all in *British Weekly*, 30th January; Dr. Robertson Nicoll, *British Weekly*, 6th February; Professor John Skinner of Cambridge, and Dr. Hastings, in *Expository Times*, March; Dr. Archibald Cameron, in *British Weekly*, 20th February; Dr. Mair of Earlston; Mr. Morgan, Edin-

Cemetery,[1] half-way between his two homes on the sunnier Edinburgh slope, it was with hearts beating to the ancient tune—

"This is our master, famous, calm, and dead."

But those who had known him personally, or to whom he had come near in spoken words such as this volume reproduces, had a higher as well as tenderer thought. They thought of one who never made a great claim for himself, but for whom a great work had been prepared by the Hand which moulded his soft yet firm nature; who, missing much in life, and not wholly missing its sorrows, had opened a burdened heart to life's central and consoling secret; and who year by year drew nearer to that centre, partly in high duty dutifully done, and partly in the more direct aspirations and approaches which he here commends to others.

burgh; Mr. Stewart of Rutherford Church, Aberdeen ("One of His Students"); and Mr. Reid of Ellon—all in the *British Monthly*, March; Mr. Yule, in the Melbourne *Witness*, March 28, and Dr. James Young Simpson, in *The Expositor*, March 1902. Two deserve special record as before Davidson's death: by the late Professor Elmslie, in *The Expositor* for 1889; and by Principal Salmond in *The Expository Times* for 1897; and one after it, by Professor George Adam Smith, in *The Union Magazine* for March, April, and May 1902.

Of both classes there were no doubt others which I had the misfortune to miss.

[1] There rests also his old colleague Duncan. Among the many wreaths laid on Dr. Davidson's grave, one was an Irish Harp, in flowers, from the Irish students, and one was from Professor Kennedy's students in the Hebrew Class of the University of Edinburgh.

It remains to say something of the discourses themselves, first, as they were delivered; and, secondly, as they are left in manuscript.

Readers who have never seen Dr. Davidson will be attracted to the two remarkably pleasing likenesses of him in this book. When he faced an audience, however, one caught first the aquiline poise of the head, thrown upwards and looking down on you with an air of mingled penetration and reserve, as of one waiting to pounce upon truth—a suggestion carried out in class by the mouse-like stillness of students within his range of vision. Then there was what photography and engraving do not give—the fair complexion, with a good deal of fixed red in it, under slowly silvering hair. To the last, too, with the least touch of emotion, the sensitive lips quivered keenly, and the "thin pulse in a spare cheek"[1] was obliterated by a vivid flush that swept the whole face to its brow. But when you pass from his appearance in preaching to his utterance, the first and most impressive thing was not preaching at all, but prayer—that extempore utterance to God of the need and desires of a whole congregation with which a Scottish church burdens its minister before it allows him to address them. Davidson's performance of this duty was intensely real and tender and true,—"even in class it was the prayer of a man talking in great humility and reverence with God, punctuated sometimes with deep-drawn sighs."[2] And

[1] Deas Cromarty. [2] J. Y. Simpson, D.Sc., F.R.S.E.

in church devotion his utterances—and sometimes his presentation of those things that cannot be uttered—were arresting. It was often, I thought, as much above the level of the discourse which followed, as that discourse was above the ripple of his daily talk. I have spoken of the *level* of his discourse. But his discourse was never a level; and that is one of the points upon which readers of the smooth printed page must accept the testimony of those who heard him. None of Dr. Davidson's sermons were regarded by him as literature, and none were prepared for the press. They were all written under the influence of that traditional depreciation of popular preaching, in imaginary rivalship with thinking and theology and scholarship, which has blighted the output for the pulpit of the New College of Edinburgh as compared with that of other academical centres in Scotland, and which his own influence helped to continue. And, in point of fact, they are to a large extent what sermons so produced ought to be—straggling, shapeless, and inartistic, especially in parts less fused by emotion. But they are written in plain, manly, and sometimes beautiful English (with, of course, an occasional Scottish idiom). And to those who listened there was from the first the sense of power in reserve, and the expectation of much to come. That was first fulfilled perhaps in the use of some fit and felicitous word—often a very common word, so placed and poised as to bear a new weight of thought and feeling. But frequently there was no one word or phrase or image that you could

point to or recall: only, what in another would be a dull stream of verbal slag began now gradually to glow like furnace-metal, from a fire within the man. And this grew to a crisis and explosion of thought such as, I fear, the mere reader will never realise. It was so in all Davidson's higher utterances, even to his students who were supposed to be absorbed in Hebrew study. "When his temples flushed, and his thin voice rose into a kind of scream, and his stiffened fingers moved swiftly through the pages, the class could not take notes: every man sat staring; and it was with much ado that one kept back the tears."[1] And in his preaching the whole phenomena of emotional tension—repression, disruption, and explosion—were generally, though not always, connected with his sense of

> "the burden of the mystery
> Of all this unintelligible world,"

and the conflict of good and evil there. For that outward conflict was reflected in those inward contrasts of his own nature which have been already noted. He never, indeed, revealed these intentionally and in words. He never painted black very black and white very white, for the sake of the resulting effect. And he held strongly the doctrine that every creature of God is good, and that the promise of nature is but fulfilled in grace. Yet in spite of this trustful and sometimes optimistic theory, the earlier truth deep-seated in his nature re-asserted itself when he rose in the pulpit. No man

[1] Professor Stalker, D.D.

looked less the preacher of smooth things. He stood uncommunicative and unsympathetic, a splinter of his native granite; and the voice, edged with raw accent of the North, came out shrill as if forced from lips of rock. One thing was clear. The man before you could never be a preacher, in the sense of one delighting to impart himself to others,—perhaps not even in the sense of delighting to impart his message. That message he may consent to bear, not without solemn gratitude. But it is still the burden of the Lord; and if he bear it at all, he will bear it as a burden. Accordingly, in his sermons generally, as in those of this volume, you began with some form of the calamitous destiny which places men, at first at least, far from the Celestial Gate. You start with renunciation and exile; the thick darkness on the mount above, or the thick smoke in the death-chamber below; the hour of reaction for the prophet, the day of reprobation of the king; the visit by night of one disciple, the sceptical sorrows of another, and the great refusal of a third. Only after ploughing through immeasurable sand do you come to see, afar off upon its hill, the sparkle of the city. And even when the discourse did not present such vivid pictures from the gallery of Holy Writ, when there was a careful avoidance of sensational sorrow and avenging sin, you went through the same process and order of deliverance. You were perhaps surrounded at first merely with a stale, flat, and unprofitable world, choked with deadly monotony and

commonplace. Then suddenly there was a rift in the solid encompassing grey; a rift, a rent, and through it there flowed in—is it darkness or light? You hardly knew which at first; but of one thing you were sure—the darkness was real and cruel and crushing, and the light that wrestles with it victoriously is Divine. For the preacher had brought you back to Job and his absorbing passion, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" And it was no distant or ceremonial access, no formal salvation, of which you now felt the need. In listening to those sermons the weariness and evil and guilt around pressed you so heavily, the darkness stretched out so strangling a grasp upon the very life, that your whole heart turned at last with the too long delaying preacher—turned with a cry to the Divine for help, and refused from that centre to depart.

Dr. Davidson has not left a large number of sermons, but a considerable proportion of them have been re-written once, or even twice. The manuscripts have one great peculiarity: *none of them has a date*, either of its original composition or of any occasion when it was preached. They seem, as manuscripts, to represent very various dates; some go back to, or even before, his status as "preacher" in 1856–1858, while others seem to have been re-written within the last few years. The question of criticism which he has thus bequeathed—to be solved by changing handwriting and fading paper and ink, and other indications more historical and outward, or very per-

sonal and inward—might have become one of importance as well as difficulty. It has not been found to be so. Neither the matter and message of the sermons on the one hand, nor the vigour or other characteristics of the composition on the other, are found to vary perceptibly with the dates, even when these may be separated by thirty or forty years. This is a remarkable fact, especially as it is ascertained that a number were written in youth, and that even when these have been recently rewritten they were not substantially altered.

> "He dreamt not of a perishable home
> Who thus could build."

But in this, as in other matters, Davidson changed little, and remained *qualis ab incepto*. He held, indeed, like his forefathers, that a man's inception and shaping are not wholly on this side of time. But we have seen enough to assure us that the substance and drift of his preaching, as of his prelection from the chair, were matter also of early and persistent choice.

The sermons that have been selected all deal with the history — and generally with a spiritual crisis in the history—of some Scripture personality. They undoubtedly form the most striking series that could be constructed from the manuscripts, and they include those discourses that have been the most popular. They are probably also among those most characteristic of the author. His own strong statement, when a very young preacher, was—

"When we are sick in soul, and casting about in

Scripture for something to meet our wants, it affords us unspeakable comfort to find not only our case, but *ourselves*, as it were, in some of the men of old."[1]

[1] This sentence is interesting, as having been originally uttered with reference to the Apostle Thomas, and to Davidson's remarkable reading of his character, as combining an almost fierce fidelity and tenderness with sluggish despondency and obstinate self-will.

For the selection and editing of the following discourses readers are indebted to the Rev. Professor Paterson, D.D., the colleague, and now the successor, of Dr. Davidson, in the chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature. For materials towards this biographical notice my thanks are due, first, to Mr. Thomas Davidson, the surviving brother, and to Mrs. Ogilvie, the niece of the late professor; but after them to many others, especially to Principal Donaldson of the University of St. Andrews, and to the Rev. James F. Duguid of New Machar; to the Rev. Dr. Mair of Earlston, and to Dr. Archibald Cameron of Edinburgh; to Mr. Charles Michie, Librarian of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and to the Rev. John Morgan of Viewforth Church, Edinburgh; but, above all, to the Rev. Dr. Webster Thomson of Aberdeen, Dr. Davidson's friend and my own, on whose fine judgment and unfailing kindness I have freely drawn.

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I

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

I

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

HEBREWS xi. 8–10, 13–16

THESE words contain not so much a definition or description of faith as an illustration of it. The definition is given in the beginning of the chapter. Faith is the evidence of things not seen; and the chapter is filled with illustrations and examples, both of this faith itself, and of the actions which men, when they have it, are enabled to do. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out to a place which he was to receive; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. That Abraham was aware of being called, that he felt called of God to go out, was faith; that he realised that there was a place which, as was represented to him, he was going to receive, was faith. That he set out resolutely to go forward to it, not knowing the way, not knowing whither he went, was either faith, or part of conduct which faith gives rise to. The whole comprised one very complicated and illustrious instance of faith.

There are three main elements in the act, three

feelings, so to speak, in Abraham's mind when doing what he did. First, the feeling that God was bidding him leave his present abode, his present way of life, and turn his back upon it for ever. Second, the feeling that He was bidding him leave it in favour of another, which He would bring him to, and settle him in; another, better, higher, where God was more near—in a word, one more godly. And, third, the feeling that though this abode and life doubtless existed, and that some time and somehow he would reach it, there was considerable obscurity hanging both over it, and over the way to it.

With regard to itself, it was represented to him somewhat vaguely as "a place," or, a little more clearly, as "a land"; and he probably conceived it as something not very unlike what he was leaving. It was at least a human life and abode; and though his imagination might rear a grand enough fabric of expectation, there was but one certainty in it—that whatever it should turn out, it was given by God, and God was in it. And then, as to the way towards it, that is represented as almost entirely unknown: he went out, not knowing where he was going. At most, he had some idea perhaps of the direction; it was not east nor south, not towards the source of light; but north and west, towards the dark inhospitable north, towards the place of the setting sun, that he was bidden go. And the having of these feelings, and the acting upon them, the apostle describes by the great name of Faith. "By faith Abraham, when

he was called, obeyed to go out; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off."

I. Now, first, we may think a little of this man's feelings and views, when starting to seek the promised land. "By faith Abraham, when called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he was going." There are two things here—first, his feeling of being called, and his obedience to the call. "Being called, he obeyed to go out to a place." And, second, his great ignorance about the place and the way to it: "a place which he was to receive"—"and he went out, not knowing whither he was going."

First, Abraham felt called to go out, and he obeyed to go out. He felt, somehow, an impulse to leave his kindred and his native land; and it was not a natural impulse. He felt under a pressure, as from God, to leave the life he was living; he must be up, and away from it.

It was not interest that moved Abraham to quit his native land. Interest would rather have kept him where he was. It was a gorgeous land in which he dwelt. Ur of the Chaldees was long held to lie up among or near the mountains of Armenia. It is now understood to have lain low down on the great stream which was formed by the union of the Tigris and the

Euphrates—the land which was probably the cradle of mankind—the humid, rich, alluvial land, robbed by the great river from higher regions, and borne down and deposited here. This hot and humid plain was the garden of the Lord. The tropical steam went up like a mist, and came down in dews that watered the face of the ground. The earth seemed to bring forth of herself harvests dense and rank. Here, too, was the birthplace of the arts, of music and building. And here science achieved her first triumphs among the stars. Below, but a little, lay the Indian Sea, bringing in all the riches of the Gentiles; and above, the great river came down, bearing upon its bosom the produce of the plain and of the hills. And all around was luxuriance both of nature and life, and a society distinguished by vigour both of body and mind, advancing like a broad tide in all that renders man famous and life high. This was what Abraham was bidden go out from. And before him lay what he was bidden face—the trackless desert which seemed to bound the habited globe; and behind it the sun went down, and all was unknown.

And if it was not interest, neither was it love of adventure or restlessness, that led him on. He had attained an age when adventure ceases to be attractive. He had long ceased to pursue ideals. When men are entering upon life, its infinite possibilities excite the heart. There is perhaps no human soul which has not a greatness in it, when youthful. Purposes and hopes, not unworthy to be named high, fill every heart at the

beginning of life. With one, it may be the desire of action, the impulse to accomplish something, to conquer, to rise to the command; with another, it may be a bent of contemplation, a sympathetic yearning that longs to go down into deep mines of knowledge, to work himself into the spirit of the men and peoples of the past, and live with them; and then, by combining and comparing the tendencies and the forms of life of many ages, to rise to wide generalising over the meaning of human life, the capabilities of the human spirit, the goal towards which it is slowly but progressively moving, and the great results which it may yet attain. But in all there is an impulse, a movement of the forces of life; many times perhaps nothing more than an indefinite yearning which swells the heart, like the force within the bud in spring, working towards flower and fruit. When the spring of life is past, how many of these buds may be seen, having never burst to give rise to flower, but remaining hard, withered abortions! The youthful spirit is like a generous wine: innumerable sparkling impulses rise to its surface, and ream upon its top. Ere mid-life, perhaps, these will all have passed away; and he, in whose heart they sparkled keenest, would be thankful if but an air-bubble would rise and burst, to move however slightly the surface of that sour and stagnant pool which he calls his mind.

But this was not the kind of movement in Abraham's heart. The old man of more than three-score and ten had gone through all this before. It was not the

opening energies of life putting themselves forth within him, not even the energies of a high moral life. For there is often in the youthful heart the resolution not only to do, but to be; to live purely, to act truly, to do justly, never to tarnish by any foul act that wonderful thing *life*, that so fascinates it as it stands before it. But there was more here. For such thoughts as this must have lain, in Abraham's history, far behind the events that were now occurring. With him, now, there was something else. The kind of feeling he had was, that it was God that was bidding him go out, and that it was God that was going to lead him; and that he would have more of God, even perfect knowledge and fellowship with God, when once he had reached that place whither he was journeying.

Now all these feelings about God, and about this unknown place which he was to receive, the apostle calls *faith*. We wonder how such feelings got into Abraham's mind. We say God spake to him, revealed Himself to him. So He certainly did. But do we fancy we have explained how it was done, when we use such language? How was Abraham persuaded that it was God that was speaking to him, and that these thoughts of a distant life with God, and this impulse to arise and go out in search of it, were from God? I suppose the patriarch had no advantage over us in this respect, but the reverse. Was it more easy for Abraham to believe, for him who was the first to exercise faith, than for us now, after so long a time, and after so many

examples of faith? Perhaps God spake, in those days, in a way different from the way in which He speaks to us. But difficulties beset His way of speaking then, just as we have our difficulties now. God spake perhaps by a supernatural voice to Abraham; and we fancy that, if He would so speak to us, we should feel sure. But to Abraham's mind, perhaps, supernatural voices were not things very rare. There was nothing in this that, decidedly and without doubt, told him that it was God that spoke to him. Perhaps no account can be given of it but this: that when God does speak to a man, He speaks in such a way that the man knows assuredly that it is God that is speaking. God's voice, in whatever way it be heard—whether as what we call a supernatural sound from heaven, or as the suggestion of conscience, or as an indefinite conviction of duty, and an impulse which we can hardly explain—is self-evidencing. It approves itself to man as the voice of God. Abraham felt under a command as from God: he saw Him who was invisible. He had evidence, which he could not resist, of that place which he was to receive. And he obeyed to go out.

Now the first thing that is needful for us all, and it is imperatively needful, is to have these same feelings as this man, to have our hearts, whether we be young or old, so stirred and filled. We must have this vivid realising of God, and feel that He is bidding us arise and go out, and give up, if not the external form of our life, yet the old spirit of it, and seek a new life, if not different in

the external circumstances of it, yet having a new spirit in it. How many of us have anything like this close, direct feeling about God, or have ever had it? Or if we have at moments had it, how soon it has gone and how dull it has become—this feeling about God that He is quite close to us, amidst all our friends and occupations; and that He is speaking to us, and that He is commanding us to renounce the life we have been leading hitherto, though it be the life of our kindred and our country—to deny it and give it up, in spite of all its charms of association and custom, and start on a new life altogether, with God alone walking by our side! Abraham was called upon actually to leave his country and his kindred. And this, in his individual case, was needful, he being an old man, in order to break the spell of idolatry and business, and the fascinations upon him of that luxurious life which he had hitherto led.

And it was needful even more in another way, in order to body out fully to his mind the idea that what he was being called to was a separate kind of existence. For Abraham was the Father of the faithful. Faith was new in his time; and its nature had to be taught by a visible representation: and he was called upon to enact the life of faith upon a public stage. But to us now, upon whom the ends of the world are come, when faith has been so long in the world, and when the Son of God, the author and the finisher of the faith, has lived His life upon the earth—to us, such sudden breaks, entailing a change in one's outward life, are less needful.

And they are contrary to the intention of Christianity, which desires that faith should be so strong as to maintain a life altogether different from the world's life, even under the same outward forms of life with the world. Yet this is difficult; and there is no doubt that weak faith often suffers greatly through this sameness; and that living an external life, quite similar to that of the world, tends to identify the inner life with that of the world—in other words, to extinguish faith altogether.

Hence the helps which weak faith tries sometimes to create for itself in the shape of tents, retreats, religious conferences, withdrawals from public life, and other appliances. These things are a confession that faith is weak and struggling for existence. They are like the stimulants administered to one that is sick, in order to keep up the vitality. One in robust health does not need them. And they are useful only on the first or second occasion on which they are tried, but positively mischievous when resorted to habitually. For, in addition to their making religion depend on these stimulants, one observes that such conferences continually tend to decline; and the world gets hold of them, and infuses its own spirit into them; and they become mere gatherings of what is called, with unconscious sarcasm, the religious world; and are stages on which the love of pre-eminence and the other passions of human nature play their part, with as little disguise as they do on mere secular platforms. But what the religion of Christ desires of us is, not that we should alter the outward form of our life.

but that we should infuse a new spirit into it, even the spirit of Christ. It is not that we should renounce the business, or occupation, or profession, formerly ours; but that we should carry it on henceforth, realising it to be a way in which God is with us, by which He is leading us, through which He will bring us to a promised heritage at the last.

To have this feeling of God, and to act upon it is, I say, the first thing. And it is very difficult for us to have it, as it must have been for Abraham. Whether it may be more difficult for us than it was for him, I cannot say. Perhaps equally difficult. For the difficulties are the same. It is very difficult for us to realise the Unseen. And then our minds are so occupied with life, and filled with other things—with our own immediate interests, and with the wider interests of our country, and with the absorbing events that take place in the world. Our minds have been long accustomed to be interested and occupied with these things; and they have acquired a bent in this direction. And it cannot be denied that we have a natural distaste to thinking about God.

There is one thing perhaps against us, which less powerfully affected Abraham,—the whole current of thinking in our day is away from God — I mean, away from God altogether. In his day, it was away from the true God; but our age may, in a certain sense, be called a godless age, more than any other. For the spirit of research and science is wholly against

faith; and its example is infectious. Its glory is to banish faith out of its own sphere. And men turn away, incredulous, from that which they are unable to handle and experiment upon. And every new discovery seems to push God farther back, and all life seems connectedly a chain of evolution, one thing rising up out of another; and if the process could once be started, it would go on. And though at present it seems that something, or some one, called God, must have started it, yet this may be admitted to be a subject for conjecture. Perhaps no one who hears me believes this; yet there are people among us who believe it, and their influence is felt. It exercises a deadening effect upon our belief; for there is prevalent a spirit of suspense, an inclination at least to wait till we see, which is very adverse to faith.

Now, it is well for us to turn away from that side of things, and to regard the moral achievements of mankind; to enter upon the region of the operation of men's minds in regard to what is unseen, and thus bring up the other side of the history of the human mind. We are in danger of forgetting at least three-fourths of the life and thought of mankind, three-fourths at least of the life and thought of the highest among men. It is too much to bid us believe that the problem of human destiny is being resolved, or is to be resolved, in the laboratory of the experimental philosopher. There is another crucible than that of the chemist, into which we are entitled to cast the experi-

ences of men. There is a crucible into which men feel that they themselves are cast, in order to be tried. And they are conscious of one who sitteth over them as a refiner and purifier. And though the trial seem as if it would destroy them, in their best moments they will not flee from it, but rather seek it. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Let us turn, then, to this other side of the life of man, and let us remember that there once lived a man upon the earth, in the far-away regions of the East, who had the same or similar difficulties to contend with; but to whom God spake with a self-approving power, which awoke him from his dreams of life, and silenced the questionings of his mind, and filled his heart with an irrepressible hope, and nerved his aged worn-out limbs with a strength that was unparalleled. Let us remember him, the Father of the faithful, and also the long roll of men, to whose eyes the invisible has been unveiled since then, and whose ears have caught the voice of a living God. Above all, let us remember another, a man too, the purest, the noblest, the truest, one who was in Himself all that is best and highest among men, and whose life was one continued testimony to God and His Father, who felt sent by the Father, who knew that He came forth from God and went to God, who spoke to Him, and wrestled with Him on the hillside and the ocean shore whole

nights rising up a great while before day to be with Him, and who, amidst His extremest sorrow, was not alone, because the Father was with Him. Remember all this testimony of the true and faithful Witness to the Father, and it may be that the assurance of God will break upon you too; and you will know Him, and hear His voice bidding you, as He bade Abraham, go out to a place which you are to receive.

Second, The second thing that the passage emphasises is, that Abraham obeyed, and "went out not knowing whither he was going."

To believe in, to realise, the existence of the place which he was to receive, and to go out in quest of it, not knowing where he was going, the apostle calls *Faith.* It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, the assurance that the unseen is real, that the moral ideals of our heart are truer, surer, more substantial than the very material things which we behold around us. He went out on an unknown way, in search of an unknown heritage. He believed that the heritage existed, he believed that God would bring him to it, and he cast himself upon God to show him the way. But it is his ignorance that the Scripture magnifies. Faith is belief in God amidst ignorance; it is trusting God in the dark. And how great was Abraham's ignorance we may conceive, when we remember that he was the first faithful man of the time. And how great the darkness was, on a way which none had trod in his

day! All he knew was God; that was the only firm point he had. And even his knowledge of God was faith. By Faith he knew God; by Faith he believed God; by Faith he committed himself to an unknown way towards an unknown land. This was Faith. Worthy was he to be called the Father of the faithful.

And yet, are we not called upon to do substantially the same thing—to leave what we know, and fling ourselves upon the unknown, trusting only in God? It was no doubt hard for Abraham to leave that glorious land, and his kindred, and his pursuits, and all manner of lifelong activities amidst which he had grown old—to turn his back on all this, and as a childless old man to face the desert, and enter upon an unknown journey. It is not mere incertitude that paralyses one at such a time. It is not merely the fear as to what the new world will be like. But there are regrets, human feelings that fill the heart full. The emigrant as he stands on the ship, while those dear to him beckon their farewell from the shore, does not dread the perils of the way, nor shudder merely at the coldness of that far-away unfamiliar land, which he will enter a solitary stranger. What crushes him is the severance, the separation from all the past into which the very roots of his life had struck themselves.

And it is this that makes it hard for us—and the harder, the older we have grown—to enter upon that new life on which Abraham entered. For us, as for him,

it is like cutting the cords of our heart, it is like tearing up the roots of our life. And, besides, there is the unknown, the cold and strange unknown before us, like a long journey and a foreign land. We know not where we are going. Ah! but this should not deter us. There *is* a place which we shall receive. There is One pointing out the way, and offering to go with us. And it is the peculiarity of all life, even an ordinary life, that it is unknown; that it opens up only gradually; that across the path we are going lies darkness, often close to our faces, so that we may almost feel it.

Perhaps, if we knew what lay before us, even in our ordinary life, we should hesitate to enter upon it. If the false steps and the falls, the dark wanderings and perplexities, the weariness and the loneliness—and, as we must confess upon the whole, the general failure of our life, and the missing to make it what we might have made it—if all this had been told us, we might almost have refused to encounter it. Yet, on the other hand, if the brightness of the sunshine for moments amidst the darkness, the keen delights even if transient, the successes we have had even though partial, the joy of having been able to do the little good we have done,—if all this had been told us, we should hardly have believed it. Life is not all evil, nor all good. The higher the life, the higher is both its evil and its good. The more highly organised the being, the greater are its capacities of pain and of pleasure. And in this life

to which you are called, as it is the highest, you may have sorrows inexpressible; but you will also have, and at the last this alone, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Do not refuse to enter this life because it seems a desert that lies before you: you will find wells in the desert, the purest, coolest springs bubbling up where all around is sand. Do not refuse, because you are bidden abandon your kindred. You will not find yourself, any more than Abraham did, altogether solitary. Nor because it is dark, and you cannot take one certain step — He will lead the blind by a way that they know not; He will make darkness light before them. Begin, as Abraham did, by renouncing, by giving up. If you know not what to do, you know what *not* to do. Go out, quit the old; the new will rise up before you, as it needs to be done. The word of God is, "Go out unto a land that I will show thee." He will lead you. Be satisfied with knowing and taking one step at a time.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me."

II. Now, in the second place, we may think for a little of Abraham's feelings and views, when he had entered upon the promised inheritance. "By faith he

sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country (*i.e.* as in the country of another person), dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for the city that hath foundations, whose architect and builder is God." "These all died in faith, not having received the promises."

Abraham set out, not knowing where he was going. He went in search of the promised land. That was the first scene. Now we have the second. By God's good hand upon him, he has come to the inheritance, and set his foot upon it. He has got a glimpse of what it seems to be. It has opened before him, in its hills and rich retreating valleys. Has he entered into full possession of it? Far from that. He cannot call a foot of it his own. He sojourns in it as it were by tolerance, as if it were the land of a stranger, of another. And he has no stable place of abode in it; he dwells in tents, and all his family are equally homeless.

First, What does Abraham, to his great disappointment, find?

He finds that, though face to face with the inheritance, the promise by no means puts him in possession of it, that he has to begin and gain it, quite as if no promise of it had been made to him; that he has to buy it, to fight for it, to take pledges of it by leaving his dead in it. He finds that he must use his own efforts, and his own sense of what is right and necessary, and his own judgment; and he has to restrain

himself, and wait and hope for a success which he has not yet attained. And, further, he finds that he cannot settle down in one place, and work from there in order to acquire the whole, as if he had made a sure conquest, at least, of one spot of it. He cannot call any part of it certainly his own; he has to wander from place to place, sometimes harassed by the burning heat, although generally under the grateful shadow of the oaks of Mamre. Nay, he sometimes loses all hold of it whatsoever, and, finding no sustenance in it, is driven out of it by sheer hunger, and forced to look for the means of keeping himself alive even in Egypt; discovering that though the promise ran, "a land flowing with milk and honey," there might be such a mighty famine that life could not be maintained against it.

Is not that a picture of the life of many believing men? They enter upon the promised heritage, but find themselves unable to conquer it. What characterises their experience is restlessness, instability, no settled abode, no sure footing—flitting from one spot of the promised heritage to another, finding the heritage exceeding broad, yet finding themselves without power to enter into the possession of it — finding, to their disappointment, that where they hoped the promise of God would do all for them, it seems to do nothing; and so they must put forth every effort of their own, must buy, and fight, and endure, and see their best endeavours but feebly rewarded, and the day of their hopes ever deferred. They wonder that God does so

little for them, does in fact nothing for them distinctly and apart from their own endeavour, except it be that somehow He sustains in them the hope that He will yet do much for them. And under this hope they are able to put forth strong efforts of their own; and when these are not crowned with success, they are able to wait.

There are some, no doubt, with whom it seems otherwise, some who feel that they have at once entered into full possession. They call themselves perfect, and feel that they sin not. Perhaps there is a certain truth in these experiences. These are people full of a fresh enthusiasm which keeps up their minds above ordinary life; and when the mind is fully set on one high subject, lesser things do not intrude themselves readily; and they are not noticed, when they do intrude. And perhaps the persons who speak in this way, just because they are occupied with looking intently on the unspeakably great Object with whom they feel themselves in fellowship, are not very close observers of what passes in their own minds; and many feelings, which, to more subtle analysers and keen scrutinisers of themselves, are painfully visible as wrong, escape their observation. And it is to be feared also that they do not start with a very high ideal, and do not feel that they fail, because the thing which they attempt to reach is not very lofty.

The Apostle Paul, who may perhaps be justly enough styled an advanced Christian, counted not that he had attained or was already *perfect*. On the other hand,

Scripture does call people perfect—"let as many therefore as be *perfect* be thus minded." But one must apply the rules of common-sense to Scripture, and interpret its language according to the connexion. The term "perfect" is used in Scripture as we use it ourselves, when we do not mean to assert absolute faultlessness. Noah even before the Flood was styled a "just man and *perfect* in his generation"—but we all know what happened in Noah's history after the Flood. Such words as perfect, righteous, and the like, in Scripture, mean that the men so called were godly, converted men, but not that they were absolutely without sin.

At any rate, whatever the experience of some men, the experience of most is like that of Abraham. You feel, though you have entered upon the promised inheritance, that you have not got full possession of it. Faith does not give to your mind that quietude and universal satisfaction which you looked for from it. It does not all at once eradicate avarice. It does not immediately subdue an imperious temper. It does not fill the mind with a wide charity, in which the conduct of meddlesome unthinking men is at once excused. It does not throw an all-encompassing light over the universe, which solves for ever the riddles of the painful earth. Perhaps even the bloom of early religious feeling falls off, and the mind grows dull and hard; and there is a revulsion, and a general sense of dearth and straitness, so that you are fain to take up with the Philistines, and are compelled to descend into Egypt, that you may find

something to keep the soul within you alive. Yet do not despond though that should be your feeling, though it should happen to you, as to him, that the only possession you can call your own is a burying-place which you have provided, being resolved that nowhere else shall you rest; though you are sometimes driven out of it altogether as you think, and your only hold of it is the promise, and some memories of a time when you thought you had a footing in it. Yet do not despond—such disappointment is the way to true attainment at last.

Second, There is no sign of despondency in the case of Abraham.

The disappointment and delay cleared his view of what the heritage was. Probably he set out, with no very clearly defined idea of what he was to receive. He had not got possession even of that which he was led to expect. But he had attained to the feeling that possession of it would not satisfy him. The little possession of it that he had, raised a larger object of desire before his mind. But the first defeat of his hopes cleared his mind of clouds; and there stood out before him the object of his desire, no more dim, but well defined. "He looked for the city which hath foundations, whose planner and builder is God." That which he longed for bodied itself out to him as a city—a city with foundations—a city planned and built by God. It was no more a place merely, nor a land merely—it was a city of God, a stable, eternal dwelling-place, no mere

tent, pitched and struck many times a day. It had foundations; it was the rest of the people of God.

Then it was the city. The city produces the highest form of human life. There the individual man attains to his perfection; there the man is educated on all his sides, and has full scope for all his powers. It was not a land merely where men, isolated and scattered, grow up gigantic, perhaps, and powerful on occasions, yet onesided and without the balance given by the collision of citizen with citizen, without the sympathy and the justness and the human breadth and moderation that men acquire by being in constant contact with men.

But again it was the city, where not only the individual attains his highest pitch of perfection, but where there is combination and order and government, and men unite to carry on the concerns of civil, well-ordered life, and project the great schemes of human endeavour, —a life of organised society where each individual has reached his highest, and yet where all unite to order and execute the affairs of all for the good of all—a life altogether human, and yet altogether godly. They were no fanatics, these Old Testament patriarchs; they looked for the city.

The architect and builder of the city is God. He designed it, drew the plan and sketch of it, with all its streets and ways, and walls and battlements, for the habitation of man; and to every man whom He leads out of his own city of destruction, He unveils the form of it in some measure, giving glimpses of its shining

towers, even if afar off, and helps him to form in his heart some conception of it, some ideal of its plan and of its life—the city whose designer and builder is God. What city shall we think of as like it? Shall we think of the Old Jerusalem, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth? No city ever had its streets flooded so deep with blood as that city. No city ever saw such tragic sights as it saw. On one side of it, in the broad day, it looked upon its excited masses pouring out at its gates, and swarming, in scornful hooting crowds, around the Cross, where hung the Holy One and the Just: on the other side of it, it saw a cowering wretch stealing out in the darkness towards that haunted glen of Hinnom, and, with awful despair on his face, hanging himself on a stunted tree in that cursed valley.

Or shall we think of some city of our own, as we have sometimes seen it, on some day of royal joy, when the lively flicker of the lamps seemed as if joy and laughter were expressed in matter? Did not the light and joy throw into deeper shadow the sorrows and the sin, the squalid shivering poverty in crowded courts, the riotous shout and low debauch, more riotous and more low on that night than on most, and the mortal agonies that were being borne, and the terrors felt of entering upon the unknown darkness, even at the moment when the crowds without were shouting their salutations of the light?

Not that city nor this, but that other which shall be. For we look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein

dwelleth righteousness. Keep therefore before you this city that hath foundations, whose builder is God—that well-ordered, active, just, human, godly life; strive to reach such a city, such a social, friendly, human life, and life with God. You may not succeed; but you will find pursuing this object greater blessedness than attaining any other. You will no more be mindful of the country whence you came out. There will be ever growing up in your heart the ideal of the city where God is, where men are, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And if, like Abraham, you have to die in faith, without receiving the promises, it will be but a step till faith gives place to sight, and all God's promises become Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.

II

JACOB AT BETHEL

II

JACOB AT BETHEL

GENESIS xxviii. 10–22

So wonderfully rich is this singular passage that it would be unwise to seek to exhaust it. I will rather endeavour to direct attention to a few of the most luminous points in the narrative, and not seek to reach the intermediate parts which lie deeper, and perhaps beyond us. The transactions are recorded in the history of a man, of all the patriarchs perhaps, most like ourselves; and, with God's blessing, our consideration of them may not be without use to us.

I. And first it is well to notice the circumstances in which this part of Jacob's history took place. It was when he was setting out in life, leaving his home for the first time, but finally, to enter upon the career of life, and be henceforth independent and master of himself—going among strangers, to make his way in the world and run an honourable course, or fail and sink into deserved obscurity.

Whatever consoling power this vision and history has, it has especially to the young on the threshold of

life, when they are taking the first step on the dark, unknown road which we call living. To all such, going out into life, is this vision sent. Or when one, no longer young, is now for the first time taking on him the part he is fitted to play in life as men often through overmuch wealth, or love of ease, or want of stimulus, or too indulgent parents, hide their talents, not perhaps themselves knowing their own capacities, and forget their responsibilities, and live away their life, and are much longer in this luxurious age in needing to take some decisive step than their fathers were), to such, when at last awakened to the duty of doing God's work in the world, this vision comes with strong encouragement. For all of us have some line of life chalked out for us by God, some place to take among other men. And when, after many failures perhaps, we seem to have at last found it, and feel or seek to feel that we are entering upon it, we are entitled to turn to this history as containing God's message to us, now that we also are putting out our hand to help on His great work in the world.

And there are many others, perhaps indeed almost all, even of those already entered upon work and life, who may take encouragement from this vision, not it may be to begin absolutely, but to make a new beginning. For few there are who, on looking back, will feel satisfied with the past. It has been, at best, a languid career of goodness, even where it has been good; and it is marked all along with failures and sins

which have greatly weakened it; and many times they feel as if life were going to die out of them altogether, and they long to take a fresh start—to begin, as it were, anew again. But with the memory of former failures and former falls, that is difficult; and they need encouragement. Every one, therefore, anxious to retrieve the past, and eager to enter with new life upon the future, I would exhort to study the vision given to this weary traveller.

II. The reality of the things seen in the vision.

"Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it." This, I say, is particularly to be observed, that what Jacob saw was not some new thing created to be shown to him; it was something already there, which he was now enabled to see. Jacob knew it to be a real thing; the only wonder was the opening of his eyes to see it—"this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." "Surely the Lord is in this place." Those things which Jacob saw are always to be seen; they are real things, if we had but the eyes to see them. This ladder is always set up; it always binds earth and heaven together. The Lord is always standing at the head of it. Angels are always crowding up and down upon it, ministering to them who shall be heirs of salvation.

Does it not often seem to us—to us who want the

eyes to see what Jacob saw — that there is no communion between earth and heaven, that God is far away, that no cry or influence of ours can ascend, and no voice or help can come down? Does not the earth and our life upon it often seem very commonplace, weary and monotonous in the field, in the shop, on the waters,—one vast waste, lonely and unrelieved? Particularly, when going out into the world, as Jacob was, on the solitary way of life! For our everyday life greatly resembles his. There comes a day in the history of us all, when we are thrust out at last from the parental home, and cast upon the unexplored wilderness of life. Many have traversed it before us; but upon that ever-shifting sand no permanent track remains. Each new traveller finds it trackless and vast. Around its edges, perhaps, the countless travellers have beaten a way a little; for a short distance the commonplaces of conventional movement are visible; but by and by they are lost, and there stretches away before us an unbroken unknown. We have to live, to mark out our own path, to shape with but few possible aids our own course. To us as to Jacob it is a time of perplexity; it is the day of our distress.

And perhaps some one hears me, who stands in Jacob's position, who is now being put in charge of himself, and is bidden lean henceforward upon his own arm, and rule his passions henceforth himself; bidden not squander his early powers, but conserve them for noble ends; bidden enter the strife with the world, and use his

example and influence and place for the highest purposes, be no longer a child but a man, a power in the world, to fashion it and subdue it, and do God's work and will in it, and who feels lonely, and too weak to go forward to so great a work. Or perhaps some other one listens, who is now leaving her home to serve, and feels to what she is exposing herself; how, daily, she will see and hear things that will work their poison gradually into her mind, how selfishness and lust stalk abroad, and will use all means to offer her a sacrifice upon their horrid altar; and how she is too weak to fight her own way, and is lonely and deserted, and seems but the destined victim of the prevailing evil—to her, to all, I say: Open your eyes on this sight that God is showing you, and hear the words He is addressing to you: "I will be with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

Or is it possible that your case resembles this wanderer's even more closely? It may be no unstained youth that you are going out into the world with, to expose to its seductions. You are going into the world, it is true. But it is not quite in innocence. You know guile already. The first step in evil has been taken. And, added to the perplexity of entering alone upon an unknown way, there is the weariness and despondency coming from having to carry a load that no one is able to lift from your shoulders. This is your case, as it was Jacob's; and it was the day of his distress. Perhaps his distress was caused, in some

measure, by the feeling that he was now parting from some he might see no more; and by this, too, that he was parting in anger from some that he loved. And he might not be altogether easy, when he reflected on the possible consequences of his hasty brother's resentment.

But I think his distress was chiefly caused by the feeling that he was now alone, and that he had now taken himself in charge, and must think and resolve for himself, and fight his own battles, and meet foes he was little able to cope with, and resolutely look into the dark future out of which he knew not what might come, — just as he must also, with what of resolution he could muster, look back into the dark past from which he was fleeing. It was to Jacob in this condition, with the unknown before him, with his sin behind him, that God showed this vision, and that God spake these words: "I will be with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." Ah! what things we might see, whether we be innocent or guilty, if we had but eyesight!

To most of us the earth seems very commonplace, with not much beauty in it; it speaks little to us, it is weary, and the same from pole to pole. And our daily life is listless and dull, with no depth or novelty in it, merely mechanical. But let some divinely gifted man, some poet, arise; and to him all things are transformed. To him our daily life, so uniform to us, is fresh and new and strange; and even the experiences of some humble cottager he weaves into a song that thrills the

deepest human heart. And so, what strange sights a little faith helps us to see! How it transforms the complexion of the world, how it pierces the veil that is hung across the face of things, and sees marvellous things behind! Till God opens our eyes, we see little. We come into the universe of God like the lower creatures—born blind. A miracle of healing must pass upon us. The Lord must put His fingers on our eyes, before we see anything of the true depth even of our common life and its relations; and, much more, of the inner life. Nay, we do not know God Himself, till our eyes are opened to see Him. The disciples on the way thought the Lord a common stranger, till their eyes were opened, and they knew that it was Jesus. This wanderer thought the land of promise a weary, God-abandoned spot; God opened his eyes, and he found himself lying at the gate of heaven.

Surely it is this waking, everyday life, that is a dream; and our dreams that are real. Surely it is but in far-divided moments of our life that we really live, when the eye has a strength to see the forms, and the ear a sharpness to catch the voices, of a farther world. Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder, and behold the Lord stood above it. He saw while in a trance, but having his eyes open, the vision of the Almighty. He saw the Lord looking down upon him from above. As a mother will steal to the side of the cot, and steal away again; and steal back and be surprised, in the act of leaning over it, by the opening eye of the sleeper;

so the great Father of all was found, by this weary dreamer, bending down to watch his uneasy sleep. Ah! if men in the weary pilgrimage of life, when they fling themselves down on the hard pallet, exhausted with the toils of the day that is past, anxious and troubled about the day that is to come,—if men, weary and heavy laden, burdened with their sin and fleeing from the evils of it, could but know that a Father's eye is following them, looking on them with a pity and a sympathy such as man never felt for a child of his in pain and trouble!

I cannot help emphasising this circumstance, that it was to Jacob, immediately after his sin, that this vision was shown. Jacob was a young man. And, like him, young men at home or away from home fall into sin. Some temptation meets them, and they commit a great evil. And the sin is apt to give a complexion to their life. It introduces a contradiction into their life. The good they had resolved to follow seems lost and hopeless. A certain recklessness results; and they repeat the evil. But a life is not to be despaired of, though stained with such a sin. It is a faithful saying that Christ came to save sinners. It was to this youth, just after his sin, that God opened up this great prospect of a life with Himself, under His guidance and keeping—"I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest."

III. The vision itself.

Jacob felt lonely and weak; and he felt, too, upon him a burden of another and a heavier kind. It was the first night of his pilgrimage. The activity of the

day had sustained him; but when the darkness came down, his heart filled with sensations he had never known before. And God used the thoughts that had been working all day in his mind to attach His revelation to. This is the way in which revelation generally came. It came when needed. It was made to fit into the circumstances and feelings of the man to whom it came. It came in such a way that it seemed to grow out of the mind of the prophet who gave it. Men lived in the truth of God. They moved, not intellectually, but with their whole life, from circle to circle, into wider ranges of the revelation of God. Like any weary, troubled, sinful fugitive, Jacob dreamed; and his dream was woven out of the materials that, all day long, had been fermenting in his mind.

Again the dream was a true dream, true to the conditions of the dream. It grew. The fabric reared itself step by step. Not at once, but gradually, the mind created it. *Behold*, a ladder; and *behold*, the angels; and *behold*, the Lord. Wonder after wonder unfolded itself. It grew in distinctness and meaning to the seer. He saw but the vague, indeterminate ladder at first; he looked longer, and there came into distinctness manifold beings, crowding up and down; his eye followed its awful steps from earth to heaven, and a new and more amazing sight showed itself: The Lord stood above it; and, yet once more, a voice came rolling down its steps: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham thy father." What the ladder's appearance was, we need hardly

inquire. Whether it shaped itself to him like the terraced incline of some dim mountain, sloping up to heaven through the night; or whether, rather, it seemed like bars of light, as even in a dark and cloudy day you have seen, through a rift in the clouds, the almost solid sunbeams strike slantingly down to the earth: how this was, matters little. More important was the general truth, the connexion of earth and heaven, the nearness of heaven to earth, the busy intercourse between the two—the fact that there stood, with His feet not far above the earth, and His eye resting on it, and His voice falling upon it, a Living God.

Wonderful as was the sight, almost more wonderful were the words heard by Jacob: "I am the God of Abraham." "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest." He is shown the past and the future, the things of eternity and those of time, all in one. He saw earth and heaven in one. He heard the bygone generations of his race, himself, and all the distant families of men that were yet to come, linked in one. When God manifests Himself to a man, the effects are not always the same. When He manifests Himself in connexion with a man's sin, it is generally with an isolating effect. The man feels himself alone. He seems to himself the only sinner in the world. God and himself are alone in the universe; and his sin is set in the light of God's face. But when God manifests Himself in a gracious way, it is

generally with what might be called a fusing effect. The man feels himself no more standing apart; he is melted into relations with all about him. All things have become new. His godly forefathers that are gone, the families of men that are to come, he is one with them all, drawing a blessing from the past, and being a blessing to the future. Particularly, all connected with himself is now fused into one: the distant, back-lying influences that, working slowly, have brought this about at last—"I am the God of thy father"; the unity and quality of all his present life—"I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest"; and the influence of himself and of his life upon the future—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

It is a strange thing that the heart of God seems not incapable of particular friendships. Our Lord, while on the earth, had those whom He specially loved; there was the disciple whom Jesus loved. And He loved the members of the little household at Bethany, even the elder sister, the kindly, commonplace, homely woman, whose goodness of nature showed itself in ministering to external wants, as well as her more ideal and attractive younger sister. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." God's love to a family becomes hereditary—"seed of Abraham," "beloved for the father's sake." And so still. Your children, if you are the friends of God, will be loved of Him for your sakes. He will reveal Himself to them saying, "I am the God of thy father." If

you are the friends of God, though you can leave your children nothing, you can, so to speak, take God into your hand, and assure yourself that He will provide for them. Like Paul, you will be able to say, "*My God* will supply all your needs." Men are sometimes heard saying, "I am not a Christian myself, but I should be glad if my children were." Unfortunately, in the case of such children, there is less chance of that than there should be; but there is almost assurance, if the parent can say, *My God*; for the children of God's people are, from their birth, objects of God's peculiar love: "I am the God of thy father." And He comes seeking to gather together the forces of our life. He comes in memories and thoughts of the past, "I am the God of thy father"; and He comes in thoughts that project themselves out far, thoughts of our influence upon the future, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Jacob perhaps stood in the midst of the stream of blessing, we but in the midst of some side rivulet that falls into it; yet our influence may help to colour the great stream of blessing to all men, and to augment it.

We wonder at the force exhibited, and the amount of work accomplished, by some men. And, on the other hand, we wonder how little greatly gifted minds often effect. In the one case, the forces were united, and the result was great; in the other, they were dissipated, and the effect was trifling. The true uniter of all the forces of a human life is God. So, when you

are out in the darkness of night, the face of the earth is broken and without order; but, when a sudden gleam of lightning flashes upon you, all is seen in proper form and order, and becomes one. And it is not merely the religious life, but the ordinary life also that God takes care of. Our life is not two, but one. God does not care for one side of our life, leaving the other to our own care. In this promise to Jacob, both sides, if we may so speak, are included. The religious side, perhaps, comes out most in the words: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." That is the promise of salvation. The other comes out in the words: "I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest." That is the promise of keeping and providential care in this life. But both are one; God charges Himself with the care of both.

And now, have you not been yourself re-enacting this scene? "Hereafter," said Christ Himself, "ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Christ Himself interprets what His place in the world is, by His reference to this passage. He is the true ladder. It is He who binds earth and heaven in one. He is the medium of intercourse between God and the sinful world. This is the unchanging attitude of God to men, "Behold, the Lord stood above it." He is beside Christ, behind Christ; He becomes visible in Christ, audible in Christ; He becomes articulate in Christ, He speaks to men down through Christ. Lying at the foot

of this ladder, you have visits of the angels; all heavenly influences and powers stream down upon you; lifting up your eyes, you see the Lord looking upon you in pity, and hear Him speaking to you. And as you lie there to-day, this is what He says unto you: "I am the God of thy father: I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest: in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

These were the promises given to Jacob. To them God added another: "And I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." This is a seal appended to the promises, a promise that the promises shall be kept. The words seem as if they were a confidence established between God and His servant. They understood one another, as two intimate friends, in the presence of another or of many more, converse upon a topic known to the two; and one assures the other that he will do the things he has spoken of.

And have you not, each of you, an understanding with God? Has He not spoken to you often before, made promises to you? You have often conversed one with another. There are many things between you, things of which He can say to you, with your full understanding, "What I have spoken to thee of." But specially, perhaps, there is one topic that above all is between you, on which you appealed to Him, and on which He made promise to you—a worn theme, a stock subject, known to both, known to none besides.

And as you sat among your fellows, it was the theme of converse down that ladder, Christ; and His promises in Him fell upon your ear, full and ample; and when you rose to move away among your fellows, He said: "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." What was the subject? Was it sin that formed the theme of converse? You pleaded: "According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." And He answered: "I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions." You cried: "Wash me throughly from mine iniquities." And He said: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." You said again: "Iniquities prevail against me"; and He promised: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." And you were silent. And, at parting, He said: "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Or was it spiritual thirst of which you spoke, a desire that had not enough of God's presence?—"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." And He said in reply: "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." And you spoke again: "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land wherein is no water." And He answered: "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel

will not forsake them—and I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Or was it spiritual feebleness of which you spoke, inability to obey, want of will and heart to serve, want of health and robustness of life? crying out: "Oh, my leanness!" and He spake in reply: "He giveth power to the faint. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles. I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Whatever you had between you, some great need you have presented to Him, some lust you cannot crucify, some evil habit you cannot root out, some grace you cannot reach to, some blessing you seek for yourself or your child, some general sense of freedom and power and assurance,—it has often been spoken of between you and God, it has been spoken of to-day, been pleaded about by you, promised about by Him—both you and He know well of it—and He says to you: "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

IV. Jacob's response to God's offers.

Jacob vowed a vow. He responded to this marvellous vision. He was overawed and afraid; but his nature was awakened by the vision, and it replied to God's drawing of him. He vowed a vow that Jehovah should be his God. He made a resolution. He gathered himself up, and resolutely determined. He did not, as we often do, when melted or awed by the vision of God in Christ, allow the effect to wear

off, doing nothing. He came to a decision. Religion needs this both at the beginning and all through. No man ever found himself, by accident or good fortune, in the kingdom of heaven. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But he did more. He vowed a vow; and he also set up a stone. He made the inner resolution; and having taken it, he also set to this strange outward seal of it. He left there, for all men to see, a monument of his having met with God. And this is what many of you have this day been doing—making or renewing the resolution that Jehovah shall be your God—making it in Christ, and sealing it by public monument. Be sure to hold to the resolution; and when the impressions to which you yielded seem to be wearing off, seek to renew them.

The Lord, after years had gone by, and the fervour of Jacob's purpose had begun to fade, commanded him to return to Bethel; to renew old memories, to call up again the time of his early vow to be the Lord's. Ah! I daresay he would feel, with great enough sorrow, how ill his resolutions had been kept; how worldly he had grown; how the struggle with covetous men about him had made him covetous; how his mixture with the idolatries of the world had relaxed the strictness of his early principles; and how old age creeping over him had dulled all his sympathies, and in some measure deadened his first enthusiasm. But this, perhaps, was inevitable. Yet at the sight of Bethel he grew young again. The crust, the hardness put upon him by life,

fell off; and he was softened by these old memories and shook off habits that were tightening themselves about him, and became again, as of old, resolutely the Lord's. And so let us do; keep in mind, live over again, the feelings of the past, return in mind and heart to the former days. It will keep the world from breaking in upon us, and sin from gaining the mastery over us, and perverse habits from becoming fixed. It will keep our feelings green and fresh even unto old age, and give us always the fellowship of the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ.

III

JACOB AT PENIEL

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GENESIS xxxii. 22–32

THE earlier passage in Genesis, which describes how God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, when he was leaving his home, offers to us what might be called the Lessons of Beginning Life. The present passage, recording the incidents of a history twenty years later, might be called the Lessons of Mid-Life.

We are accustomed to consider Jacob as one of the most commonplace of the saints of former times. Abraham is greater than ourselves, but Jacob is like ourselves. And hardly like the nobler, but almost like the baser of us, with a coarse, ignoble nature, not pursuing his end by open, avowed, direct means, but by underhand expedients, and crafty, crooked wiles. This judgment on Jacob is, perhaps, too severe. The features of his character were certainly strongly marked, and they were not such as seem to us very lofty. And, when we consider this, we are surprised to find bestowed on him the wonderfullest revelations given by God in Old Testament times. To him, the lowest nature,

the highest things were shown. We should certainly wrong Jacob, if we called his nature shallow. Coarse it may have been, but it was intense and abundant. There was material enough of all kinds in its composition. Passion, affection, business capacity—resources enough of every kind it contained. And one sometimes observes in natures which are, upon the whole, coarse, a strong religious vein. To finer minds the union is no doubt somewhat repulsive. Yet we should perhaps be wrong, if we judged the religion of such minds ungenuine, because it coexists in the same mind with much that is distasteful to us, and often shows itself or expresses itself in a form to which we feel a repugnance.

Of the many lessons which the passage suggests, I shall mention but two, as those of mid-life. The first is this: Our sin finds us out—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

The time when this history occurred was when Jacob was returning from the East to Canaan, in very different circumstances from those in which he left it. He went out with his staff in his hand; he came back increased to "two bands." He went out alone, with life before him, hopeful perhaps of happiness, and full of aspirations, fresh and eager to run the race of life. He came back an altered and sobered man, with life behind him; with what was to enjoy of it mainly enjoyed; and, perhaps, the cup did not now seem so sweet as he thought it would be, before he put it to his lips. At all

events he had drunk it fully. He had lived a many-sided life. Of sensual enjoyments he might seem to have had his fill; and he was not averse to use the petty passions of others as the means of gratifying his own larger ones. In business he was always fortunate. In those higher things which men's hearts crave, though foiled at first, he was at last victorious.

Thus Jacob had lived a busy, clever, various life; a keen, competitive, skilful, successful life; and, with the fruits of it now reaped and gathered, he would return to rest in the home of his fathers. It is sweet to dream in a foreign land of the place of one's childhood. Imagination gilds even the sordid hovel of one's birth. We remember but the good; we forget the evil, or change it into good. And so Jacob was using the necromancer's art. The sunshine and shower of his early years he remembered but as sunshine. All the good stood out bright before him, and all the evil had disappeared. His own evil too was forgotten; or, if remembered, it was excused and forbidden to intrude itself. Our imagination of the past retains only the good; but God and conscience keep in reserve the evil. Jacob had not calculated on finding the beginnings of his life so visibly unaltered. Twenty years had passed since he did the evil. Surely the evil must have worked itself out of things, long ere now. But it had not. It stood before him now, just as it stood when he fled from it twenty years before — only more formidable, grown in bulk and terror, with greater power to do

him hurt, in proportion as he was now more susceptible of hurt. Then it was Esau, seeking Jacob's life; now it is Esau, with four hundred men, seeking not Jacob's life merely, but all those other lives into which his has been partitioned, and which are dearer to him than his own.

I. A man's sin finds him out.

Hindered by opposing circumstances, counterworked by happy influences, delayed by time, retarded by distance, sin is an influence that works its way towards a man, moving on after him unseen, till it finds him, till it finds him out. In some shape it yet confronts him, and he recognises it. He and it parted company in boyhood, in youth, a lifetime ago; and he thought it neutralised, dead and buried and forgotten; but it yet lives, and will rise like a spectre beside him—it will find him out. It may not interfere with affection, with trade, with prosperity; it may stand beside all these in abeyance. And it may be just through these that it will find him out, as Jacob's did. Even individual sins, like Jacob's or like David's, avenge themselves; and, much more, a course of sin. Sin finds a man out in the usual recognised penalty; or it finds him out in the fear that it is going to find him out, in the unquiet, foreboding conscience; or it finds him out in the bitter compunction and sorrow for the wrong he has done, and the loathing of himself when he thinks of it; or—and this is the way to be dreaded most of all—it will find him out in the hardening of his mind,

and the deterioration of his character. For it is vain to think that you can do evil, and reap no consequences from it; that you may commit sin, and have done with it. The hand of the dyer is not more certainly imbued with the colours in which he works, than the soul takes on the complexion of the thoughts in which it indulges.

Every individual thought or act leaves some impression on the mind. And as the arm of the craftsman develops and grows strong through his constant exercise of it, whatever evil passion or desire or thought you indulge, gathers strength from each act of indulgence of it. Sin finds a man out by an accumulation of sinfulness, through the hardening of his heart and conscience, through the enfeebling of the will, through the loss of all the finer sensibilities of the mind, and the general lowering of the whole tone of character. The law indeed is constitutional, and operates with certainty. When we look at our minds in this light, we are tempted to consider them only part of a great system, rigidly regulated by law.

If we were to pursue this line of reflection far, we should be landed in despair. And we are very apt to compare the laws of the material world and the laws of the spiritual world together; and, when we detach some analogies, we are ready to identify the two. Happily, the laws of the one are not the laws of the other. If the laws of the spiritual world were the same as those of the natural world, we should all

inevitably perish. Our sin would be beyond remedy, and infallibly find us out to its bitterest conclusion. If you touch fire, you will invariably be burned. If you cast yourself from a precipice, you will certainly be broken to pieces. The laws of the natural world operate inexorably. And, no doubt, just because we have a mental constitution, there are there also laws which operate regularly. But because one of the laws of our mind is that we are free and can will, and because we are in the hands of a great God who is also free and merciful, and can introduce a higher law than even the law of our constitution, we have hope. It is one of the laws of our nature, that that in us, which we may call our self, can be detached, as it were, from our nature, and set up against it, so as to resist it in its evil, and command it. And if this, which we call the self in us, be enfeebled through evil, and unable of itself to rise up against sin, the influence of God operating through the life and history of Christ can awaken it, and animate it with a divine power—Christ dwelling in our hearts.

The gospel suspends this law, that a man's sin finds him out. When God says to us "Thy sins be forgiven thee," the law is arrested. Who of us can tell what consequences of sin the forgiveness of God obviates, obliterates once for all, so that our sin no more finds us out? Who can imagine to himself the consequences of sin, which God's mercy thus repeals? Yet how very fundamental the law is in our nature, can be seen from

this, that even the gospel—even God's mercy—cannot at once obviate all the effects of this law. When the terror-stricken sinner hears from the lips of Christ those words, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more," he may, in his thankfulness, feel that all pain and all difficulty is now for ever over, and only unmingled joy before him. But it is not so. The joy of the returning prodigal does not always last. Even he finds that it is not always fatted calf, and music and dancing. After the joy of being received by his father, will come the bitterness of the thought of his former ingratitude. Under the best robe put upon him, he will loathe the unworthiness and degradation which the robe covers, and feel as if he could tear it off.

Nay, perhaps, there may be worse than that. These healthful feelings may cease after a time. As the children of Israel wearied of the manna, though heavenly food, there may come over him fits of love for his former life. Something may rise in his breast, which he thought dead, movements of his former self; and he may long to be among the swine again. And then he will learn to know that he is what his former years of evil made him; and that in those years he sowed a crop of sorrows which all the dramatic joys of his return will not save him from reaping. It would be as vain to expect that, when the surgeon sets your fractured limb, he should at that moment give you the use of it, and make it as strong as it was before, as to expect that the gospel will at once restore your mind, enfeebled and distorted

by sin, to a healthy condition. The surgeon can only put the limb in the way of recovery. It needs to be supported, and held firm with splints and bandages, and must wait the slow processes of nature, and the results of time. And so, even under the gospel, our minds enfeebled by sin must be confined, and subjected to restraints, and watched over, till in time they be healed.

Recovery, whether of the body or of the mind, is a slow thing. In some diseases, the recovery is slow in proportion to the severity of the malady; in others, the time required to recover may bear some proportion to the time during which we have been gradually falling into an unhealthy condition. In either view, our recovery from sin must be tedious. If, for very many years, our minds have been familiar with uncleanness, we cannot attain soon to that purity of heart which sees God. If, for half a lifetime, we have been greedy of gain, we shall not without many struggles cease to love the world. If, from our childhood, we have been self-willed, we shall only learn slowly and at much cost to say, "Thy will be done." These besetting sins will have to be guarded against long and patiently. That side of our mind, whatever it be, which sin has infected most and enfeebled, will be strengthened only by degrees. Yet perhaps it is a mistake to be always nursing our wounded limbs, always thinking of our besetting sins. Though it be a particular member that is disabled, yet it draws strength to recover, from the

whole body. The general health being in a high condition will facilitate recovery as much as, or even more than, merely local remedies. And it may be unwise to be always brooding over our besetting evils, giving our whole attention to checking them. This painful scrupulousness will only entail misery.

A merely negative religion, which exhausts itself in painful efforts not to do evil, cannot satisfy the mind, or form any genuine life or character. It is wiser to see to the general health of the soul. It is wiser to deepen our godliness on its positive side, to strengthen the whole soul by active obedience. And then, in the general health of the whole, the merely local and partial ailment will disappear, and not be thought of; the side of our life, which was weak, will share the strength of the whole life. Active godliness, positive spiritual-mindedness, is the surest remedy against our particular sins. "This I say," writes the apostle, —"this I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

The consequences of sin, which the gospel does not at once obviate and annul, are those which are the reflex influences of sin upon our mind and character—its deteriorating, enfeebling effect—its tendency to create habits hard to escape from. Yet the gospel does obviate these also. The essence of the gospel is, that it puts our mind into a right relation to the mind of God. It does not alter external relations; but, when our minds are in a right relation, external

things assume a new complexion. They have a new aspect, and, in fact, a new meaning. They are drawn up into God's redemptive dispensation, even when not changed externally.

There is another way in which the gospel and the overruling mercy of God interfere to obviate this terrible law of our constitution, that a man's sin finds him out. The evil that has entered the world has become, so to speak, one of the forces in the world; and, like all others, it is in the hand of God, and He graciously uses it, overrules it even, for good. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him; and the remainder of the wrath He restrains. In like manner, even those very penalties of the law by which sin finds us out, God uses to obviate the law; the evils which our sin entails, He turns into medicines to heal our sin. Thus, for instance, the very feebleness and irresoluteness of our will which a course of sin has brought upon us, this very weakness which we feel, drives us more and more to rely on God's strength, to be incessant in our dependence on Him; and so our weakness in ourselves becomes true strength—"When I am weak, then am I strong." Thus this particular effect of sin in ourselves, this evil of weakness, becomes a minister to an absolute and universal godliness; we are thrown upon God wholly. And therefore the apostle gloried in his infirmities, because they made him conscious of being nothing, and of having all in God.

Again, that very compunction and sorrow for past sin,

that very sense of loathing with which we regard ourselves, which is the penalty of our sin, becomes a remedy against it. It is true that even God's mercy cannot at once obviate the penalty; His mercy can but reduce it gradually. What sorrow was like the apostle's, when he reflected how he had persecuted the Church of God? God had mercy on him, because he did it in ignorance; but even God's mercy could not hinder the persecutor's sin finding him out in this way. Yet He could turn the penalty into a cure. The thought of his past evil quickened the preacher's zeal. It made him strive by his labours to atone for his wrong, and made him feel himself, more and more, a debtor both to the Jew and to the Greek. And in the midst of this overmastering passion, the thought of his former evil was lost; he forgot the things which were behind, and pressed towards that which was before. And, further, it brought home to him anew the adorable goodness of God: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first" — in me as a chief and typical instance — "Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe."

For though we must be careful against pressing too far this law of our nature, that sin finds us out, there is enough in it to be alarming, when we think of it. What a harvest of misery Jacob sowed for himself in the home of his mother! His act there gave a colour to his whole life. If he had an evil bias from his birth, this act gave

it overmastering force. And all of you who have the guidance of youth, and the shaping of it, think what responsibility rests upon you, how powerful the forces are with which you are working, how inevitably the law of the mind will vindicate itself! Out of very mercy for your child, beware of setting before it the least example of crookedness. You may think it is a small thing, the particular act of falsehood to the heart or to the mind which you suggest, a small thing, a thing quite defensible as society goes, a thing that will be a great present and prospective advantage; and nobody need be the wiser for it, and nobody the worse. There is one person that will be the worse for it, the person for whose advantage you advise it. The time will come when it will torture the mind like the rack, and may embitter all the springs of life, and blight, not only one life, but all the lives bound to it. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

II. The other lesson which the passage suggests, and which is another lesson of middle life, is this: That the struggle between grace and nature is a long one, and is sometimes not fought out without a certain final crisis.

It is long before nature gives way before grace, before it is subdued by the higher power; it is long before Jacob is changed into Israel. Here, we have God dealing sharply with Jacob, twenty years after He found him at Bethel. The history of Jacob's life is a common history. Perhaps it is the history even of some of us. Long ago, at the beginning of life, you had experiences; going

abroad from home, or going out among men on the journey of life, you had impressions, and made resolutions as to what your life should be. God seemed to offer Himself to you, saying: "I am the God of thy father, and I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest." And you seemed to accept His promises; and you went out in the strength of them, knowing that the Lord would be your God.

But the youthful vision of purity and nobleness was not lived up to. The resolutions of an enthusiastic young mind became gradually forgotten; and the mind itself got lowered by passion, and craft, and the competitions of life. It is useless to speculate about these early impressions, whether they were but a preparatory influence of grace, not altogether without effect, in some way perhaps restraining you from graver evils into which you might have plunged; or whether they were the sowing of a true divine seed in the heart, which the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches grew up rankly over, and well-nigh choked. Whatever they were, twenty years of life have left your mind rather callous, and estranged from such things. You do not willingly dwell upon them. This, I daresay, is a common history. It was Jacob's history. Only, in his case, the debasement of mind and the worldliness into which he had sunk were extreme. The page of history which records his life in the East is, perhaps, one of the darkest in Scripture. With occasional gleams of higher things, sensuality and worldliness make up his life. And

he now comes back, with all the consequences of these years upon him.

In these circumstances, it was not so much a question of awakening religious feelings in Jacob's mind, as of awakening any feelings of a higher kind, of breaking in upon the lethargy and moral deadness which had come over him, and opening those deeper springs in his nature, which yet remained, though covered over with a crust that could hardly be broken through. And this the providence of God effected; first, through the distress into which he was thrown by the danger of those dear to him. This awoke his mind, and stirred his nature to its depths. And it also brought him nearer to God. Having made all the dispositions that prudence could suggest—having divided his family and possessions into groups, and having placed that which he felt he could easiest spare, first, and that which he could worst spare, hindermost — having made all these arrangements, he has to await the morning and the events which it will bring. He would thankfully act, if any action were open to him; but there is none. He must wait, inactive. And as he waits, deeper thoughts begin to crowd in upon him. His anxiety in regard to others becomes an anxiety for himself; an indescribable perturbation comes over him, and he feels himself in a superhuman grasp: "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."

It is just like what you perhaps remember happened to yourself. You sat by the bedside, waiting for the

turn of the disease in one very close to you. You had done all, used all means, called in all aid; nothing more could be done, and you sat down to await the crisis. And, as you waited, your thoughts about the sufferer seemed to be reflected back upon yourself. Fountains began to open in your heart, that had long been sealed; the horizon widened, and views opened up, that had not been seen before; you felt in the presence of something greater than belonged to the earth—it was the presence of God.

And, secondly, the providence of God effected this through that wrestling which Jacob found himself suddenly carrying on: "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." He was engaged in a great struggle with an unknown adversary. The precise meaning of the incident may be uncertain, but perhaps the struggle is the main thing for a time, not the adversary. That he should know his adversary at first may not have been meant. It was meant that he should be troubled, wrestled with, shaken to the very deeps of his nature, flung into a vague, deep, dark conflict with powers but indistinctly seen. We probably mistake, when we think the struggle was at first a wrestling for a blessing. It became this only at the last. It was a struggle intended to awaken the man's mind to higher things, to things unseen; and to prove to him that, limit as he would the horizon of life, there was a wider horizon to which he must look.

We might be right, perhaps, in regarding it in some

way as symbolical of Jacob's whole life. All his life through, he had been resisting God. And now he was throwing all his force into the resistance. All his days he had opposed God, trusting to his own strength, furthering himself by cunning and stratagem. And now the conflict of grace and nature was come to a head; and both combatants were putting out their full strength. Only when the angel touched Jacob's thigh, did he know who his adversary was; and then the disabled man could no longer contend. He could only throw his arms around his opponent, and supplicate for a blessing: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The victory was God's, though it was Jacob's too—he prevailed with God.

God touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and the sinew shrank, and Jacob halted upon his thigh. When a nature is hard to subdue, it is sometimes needful for God to touch it sharply, that it may be felt who it is that is being resisted; and God's touch remains with us. When, for example, He has met us, as He met Jacob in his youth, and has followed us in all our wanderings in a foreign land, and dealt kindly with us, and made all our efforts successful; and when we have risen, through His blessing, to prosperity, but yet have remained amidst all our successes far from Him, going even because of our success perhaps farther from Him; and when we are reviving old associations, and coming back to the scene of old impressions, and when circumstances seem conspiring to awaken afresh our life in God, and when,

if we are to be His wholly, it must be now—it is then that it is sometimes needful for Him to touch us sharply, so that our nature quivers and shrinks under His touch —for a touch from Him goes to the quick, even though He touch some organ far from the centre; and we carry the touch with us to our grave. Jacob halted upon his thigh. These struggles leave their mark upon a man. Men who have passed through such wrestling are not what they were.

In this final struggle between grace and nature, in this man's history, grace was victorious. Jacob was changed into Israel. Gradually the conflict changed its character. From using force, from resistance, Jacob had recourse to supplication. He had power with the Angel, and prevailed. And then, that He might bless him, the Angel asked him his name: "What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." Before he be made another man, he must be well conscious of what he is now. Jacob gave his old name. The conflict drove him back to himself, to feel his real nature. God worked him back, through his whole past life, to its starting-point; drove him down to its old beginnings, and to the confession that he was still much the same as he had ever been. God does not name him Jacob; He took the word out of his own mouth. He only put it to him, "What is thy name?" Jacob was in no mood for concealment, and would hardly evade the question. The divine demand drew the confession from him. Before the new name could be conferred, the old name must be fully confessed—the

old name and the old nature. We must know well what nature we are of, before God can change us to another. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity—Create in me a clean heart."

I daresay we have, all of us, hours like this which Jacob had; times when, after being agitated by some dangerous crisis in our business or relationships, we feel ourselves passing into a personal agitation, engaged in a struggle with a power which we but vaguely see, and at first can hardly name; when we yearn we know not for what, and are sorrowful, though having no outward cause of sorrow; when we are disturbed more deeply than external troubles can account for; when we find ourselves writhing in the darkness, and feel touched to the quick by a hand unknown; when we become aware of something in ourselves greater than we had thought, and unsatisfied; something more mysterious in life, something wider and of greater meaning in the world than the narrow routine in which we had been running. If we could but know that it is the Angel of the Covenant that is wrestling with us! He provokes the struggle, that He may conquer us by being overcome. And the weapons of victory in our hands are tears and supplications; and the moment must be seized, or the victory will escape us—"I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The day must not be permitted to dawn upon the conflict. "Let Me go," said the Angel, "for the day breaketh." And he said, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The

moment must be seized, the victory must be won in solitude—the Man and we alone, hand to hand, with no onlookers. The first streaks of the world's sun, the first faint sounds of the returning life and thoughts of the world, will rob us of the blessing; and the disappointed Combatant will steal away, and leave us empty, and the strife in vain.

IV

MOSES ON MOUNT SINAI

IV

MOSES ON MOUNT SINAI

EXODUS xxxiv. 1–10, 27–35

IN this chapter there are three points that strike me

First, Moses went up into the darkness and found God within it.

Second, Moses came forth out of this darkness down among men, bearing in his hands to the world an eternal gain.

Third, Besides this, Moses personally had taken on a change. His face shone, though he wist not that his face did shine.

In these Old Testament narratives there is so much that is extraordinary, that they might seem to contain nothing for us to-day. But if they be unique, their uniqueness lies in their circumstances, and not in their essence. Within, the religious realities were the same as they are still, in circumstances which we regard as ordinary. The realities were that God was there in the darkness, that a man drew near and found Him, and came out of His presence into the world of men with something of eternal worth. And probably there

are times in the history of minds, even to-day, when the religious realities assume such a magnitude that the surrounding circumstances seem scarcely less awful than they did to Moses.

I. Moses was called to go up into the darkness.

That darkness surrounded God, might seem an Old Testament idea, long ago overcome. And to some extent it may be: the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. Yet the idea has its truth still. When we think of the universe, its magnitude, its mechanism which we partly understand, and its mysteries which we do not understand at all, when we attempt to take in the whole, God and darkness become synonyms. And in many conditions of our own minds, this seems even more the case. Even when we think we have attained to some light, a darkness suddenly falls on us again. The mountain summit, which seemed to have cleared, becomes again folded in a shroud.

It sometimes surprises us that our Lord's mind was so rarely directed to what we might call general questions about God, to things in providence which are problems, and cause perplexity to earnest minds. Only once or twice did He appear to touch them. The men on whom the Tower of Siloam fell, He told us, were not greater sinners than others. The blind man was not born blind because of either his own sin or that of his parents, but for wider reasons. These references, though few, may be regarded as specimens.

They are of profound worth to us, as suggesting a direction which our minds should take. If a conflict arise between our instinctive moral feelings and our reasoned system, between the milder judgments of love and those of our connected thought, between our inherent faith in the goodness of God and the conclusion which some things in history and in the life of men would lead us to draw, it is wiser to follow the former at the expense of the latter—to hold fast to faith in the goodness of God, even where we cannot see it fully verified. He who was full of grace and truth has said some things which justify such conduct.

But, ordinarily, Christ directed His words to the individual mind, and His efforts towards putting it in a right relation with God. He seemed to disclaim any other purpose, and to doubt if He had any other power. "To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give." "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." In the order of things which He came to introduce, humility was exaltation. In the circle of which He was the centre, words and things assumed an opposite meaning. We should probably be right in concluding that His teaching here, as always, was the reflection of His own mind, of the relation in which He felt Himself to stand to God the Father On earth He sought to display this to men, and to make them share it, that their joy might be full.

For even the darkness that still remains around God

does not impair this joy, but rather lends a superhuman elevation to it. The sense of God the Father, wise and great beyond understanding, begets a transcendent joy. "Jesus rejoiced in spirit." Even when face to face with the most mysterious of problems—the problem how some believe and others do not, how so many put away the truth, and live life untouched by it,—even before these problems He rejoiced, leaving them unsolved; and, as if the issue of them extended too far to be comprehended, He leaned upon the everlasting arms: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." And the Apostle Paul gloried in his own defeat by God, whose foolishness is wiser than men, and who had annihilated all his plans and aspirations, and even himself, and who led him about alway in triumph, like some great captive chief who had been subdued in war.

But, apart from this, the right personal relation to God in Christ supplies an outlook, before which the darkness retreats and rolls away. Even if the faith that all things work together for good to them who love God, should remain only a faith, and never become a sight that can arrange all particulars, it will not itself be overcome, but will go on assimilating to itself one particular after another. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

II. Moses came out of the darkness bearing in his hands to the world an eternal gain.

The darkness was not all darkness. Within the dark periphery there was a centre of light. God was within it. Nay, to this profoundly reverential mind, with thoughts of God so broad that mankind has added little to them since, the darkness was a token of God. It is perhaps sometimes the case that the darkness which surrounds God, particularly when it is, so to speak, projected around Him by the agitations of the human spirit, may at first distort the image and face of God. In his mysterious trouble, Job's mind threw up upon the clouds of heaven not the rainbow, but a distorted, angry spectre, which he thought God. And the disciples, in their peril and distress from the storm, thought that Jesus, when He appeared, was a spirit; and they cried out for fear. He came near, saying, "It is I." Nothing of this kind is said of Moses. He saw God. The darkness was not God; it only enshrouded Him. There arose not a prophet like unto Moses who saw God face to face. Those who came after him, and in their measure were like unto him, saw in part and prophesied in part. But they knew that his vision transcended theirs. He was forty days and forty nights during which he did neither eat nor drink. He had meat to eat which men knew not of. He proved to himself, and has taught us, that man doth not live by bread alone.

Moses went up into the presence of God, not with

a vacant mind, but with one laden with cares and responsibilities larger than were ever before committed to man, and with an eye opener and wider than seer ever possessed. He was not unaware of the meaning of the juncture at which he stood. History was taking a new start,—it might be said, was beginning. Streams were being opened up, which were to flow through all time, and water it. Creation had never seen her Maker so near. It was the morn of a new world. The kingdom of God was founded on earth. Probably, whoever has his eyes open, whatever be the time at which he lives, will see something of the same kind. The seeds of a new future lie all about us. The germs of great developments are in the soil. And in this age they grow with startling rapidity. The reaper treads upon the sower. The world of mankind is not played out nor grown old; neither is the Church. Both are fresher than they were a century ago. And we know not what a day may bring forth. Abroad and at home the Church has been sowing in tears, when it was not in blood; but she shall joy, as they joy in harvest. Before her pangs come upon her, Zion will bring forth; and a nation will be born in a day.

At all events, according to the breadth and depth of mind and feeling, according to the quickness and awakened state of the mind, with which one goes out from among men into the presence of God, will be the fulness of God's face seen. And according to the

fulness of God seen will be the gain, with which one comes out of His presence back to men, or back to those among whom one moves, be they many or few. Moses brought away the commandments—ten words—but they are words that live and abide for ever. That which comes immediately from the presence of God has a freshness and power which is eternal. This is always true. It is true for our own life, and true in regard to all those whom we may influence. It is what we receive, what we have of God in us, that is the salt in our life, and the leaven which we cast into the world about us. We may not bring back from God's presence anything of such absolute worth as that which Moses carried in his hand. But everything brought thence will be instinct with power and imperishable. It will enter into the life of the world, give life to the world; enter into the life of men and enrich it. And even if its form be only for to-day, itself and its effects will always abide, changing its shape, but bringing life to distant generations.

The influence we exert is to be measured by the capabilities of those we influence. Remember that your child lives for ever, that the bent you give it may be eternal, to its eternal good or its eternal evil. Remember that the words you drop will fall on some ear, and affect some soul for ever; and if they are evil words, think what you are doing. Even your gestures, which do but hint, may be more powerful than your words spoken. Our safety against these eternal dangers

from our actions or words lies in our living near to God, so that, whenever we meet those in our homes or those in the street, we shall meet them with something from God about us, some word or some flavour of disposition and character carried back from His presence.

III. The change wrought upon Moses.

When Moses came down among the people, they perceived that his face shone. Being with God, he had in a sense become transfigured. It was in similar circumstances that our Lord also underwent transfiguration. "As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered." In both cases, perhaps, it was not some external light that fell on their faces, but something within, an elevation of nature due to the fellowship of God, that revealed itself without, in the face and form. In Christ's case, it was perhaps what He was, revealing itself; in the case of Moses, it was something which he had become. The words of Scripture sometimes appear paradoxical. Yet perhaps they are always true. Moses was made partaker of the divine nature. He went up, burdened with the needs of the people, his heart filled with thoughts almost too great to be contained. He came back, with a certain God-likeness impressed upon him.

The people perceived the glory upon Moses, though he wist not that his face shone. There is in men, if one might say so, an instinct for God. They perceive His marks; they are sensitive to godliness. Perhaps

it was this that Christ referred to, when He uttered some of the most serious words that ever fell from His lips, about speaking against the Holy Ghost—"Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him." He meant wilfully contradicting that instinct which could not but recognise, in Himself and His works, the good Spirit of God. This instinct is the hope of all who come from God to men. And we all do this. The words of Christ, "As My Father sent Me into the world, even so send I you," were not meant to be confined to apostles. One of these apostles says to his converts, "Ye are an epistle of Christ"—a letter from Christ—a message of Christ. If, when the mother went into the nursery, the children felt that she was a letter to them from Christ; or, if, when the father joined the household in the evening, or the master went among his workmen, household and workmen felt as if a message from Christ had come to them, how changed things would be! For children, households, and workmen—all men everywhere—have this instinct for God, that recognises God. And the capabilities of this instinct cannot be measured, nor the opportunities it offers. For it is not a thing that belongs to one part of man's nature; it is rather a network of sensibilities overspreading the whole nature; and it can be touched, and played upon, and the heart can be awakened through it in a thousand fashions. And it is most readily affected indirectly and informally, when it, so to speak, itself discovers and

feels, without having anything obtruded upon it, as the sleeping eye is awakened just by the presence of the day-dawn. That which it is alive to, is something just as broad as itself—what we call character. If in the infinite forms in which a character reveals or betrays itself, in words or tones or gestures or actions, in all that constitutes a life—if, I say, in all this infinite variety there breathe out godliness, it will touch some sensibility, something in other minds, and be recognised.

For this influence, which is the strongest influence one can exert on others, is often unconscious. The people felt what Moses himself was not conscious of; he wist not that his face shone. He was the last to be conscious of anything in himself above the common. He was averse to assume the great place he had to take. The man was very meek. He had learned in the school of adversity. A later writer ventures to say of him, that he had ere now borne the reproach of Christ. He was unconscious of the power he possessed, and of the fragrance of God, which every movement of his life breathed out upon the people. But men felt it. His silent influence was almost more powerful than his words. The personal character that accompanied his words pervaded them, and lent them force. What we call an office, and even old hereditary truths, need to be vitalised and animated throughout by a personality. Without this life within them, even old truths are mere husks.

It is well, and perhaps not very difficult, to write an address on a text of the Bible; it is well to seek to explain a passage to a class in the Sunday school; it is well to teach the children to say their good words; but the only thing in the world, that has power to move others, is reality, conviction, personal character. And all our efforts will bear little fruit unless this personal character be behind them, unless we can make others feel that the lesson we are giving them is just our own selves, our own life put into words. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."

V

SAUL'S REPROBATION

V

SAUL'S REPROBATION

1 Samuel xv

"And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? . . . Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord? . . . And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites."

Saul, when he came to meet Samuel, saying he had done the will of the Lord, was expressing his honest belief. He was not a vulgar hypocrite, detected in the act of pretence, and merely seeking to brazen it out, and put a good face upon it. He believed what he said. He fancied himself obedient to the command of God and the words of Samuel. He did not know what obedience meant. Pretence was not one of his faults. Religious incapacity was his fault—was the characteristic

of his mind. He had not the faculty of knowing what religion meant. He might know that religion meant a full surrender of one's will to God; but he was too blunt, in a religious sense, to understand what a full surrender was. He knew that Jehovah demanded obedience; but he could not so analyse his own mind, he could not penetrate so deep as to know what obedience really was, how absolute it must be, how exact and verbal, how minute and particular. He took a general compliance to be obedience.

Now this was the characteristic of Saul's mind. He wanted religious depth. He was not quite an irreligious man, least of all was he an immoral man; but religion was not able to make much of him. He had general notions of what religion demanded, but he could not realise it in its depth. And this peculiarity of his character was not a common defect merely; in him it was notable. Even the common people remarked it. It was to them, with their often keen insight into character, very observable. Hence they thought it even amusing, when Saul was seen in the company of the prophets; and it gave rise to a popular proverb at his expense, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" It was quite incongruous to them, this consorting with men of profound religious convictions and experiences, on the part of one who hitherto had not only shown no liking for such company, but who, anyone could see, had no capacity for such a life and such duties as the prophets undertook. This was how the feeling about Saul showed

itself among those who observed things in a lighter and more kindly way; but, perhaps, the same feeling came to light among other elements of the populace in that morose and scornful demand regarding the new-made king by some whom the author, in his anger, names sons of Belial: "How shall this man save us?" And they despised him, and brought him no presents.

But again this religious incapacity of Saul goes some way to explain his madness. His madness was not a general insanity; it was a mere mania, and it seems to have had a religious origin. There would be, of course, an ill-balanced mind to begin with; but it was his circumstances that overthrew it completely. We sometimes attribute the fall of his mind to jealousy. But, though he was profoundly jealous, his madness had shown itself long ere David was known to him. It is described as an evil spirit from the Lord that troubled him; and the shepherd-boy famed for his skill on the harp was first brought into Saul's presence, to quell with his sweet sounds the unquiet demon of the king's mind. But this unquietness must have come from thought, from uneasiness, from a sense that circumstances around him were wrong. His position perplexed himself. He was disappointed. He knew he was unsuccessful. He felt he was unable. Samuel haunted him. He would do right, but he could not. It was beyond him, this kingdom of God of which he had been made king. He was like a blind man commanded to look; or as one paralysed, who is told that it is his duty to walk. The

hollowness and unreality of his position upset his understanding. He felt his incompetence; and the feeling preyed on him, even to madness.

I will not say that there is any mind which is incapable of being impressed by religious truth, under the influence of God's Spirit. Yet we must confess that to be religious is a much harder thing for some minds than others. There is a natural devoutness in some minds. And there is a want of devoutness in others, so that they hardly can become religious.

There are characters incapable of being deeply religious. You have seen them many times. You have seen them even in your own families. Have you not felt, when you were striving to inculcate truth upon your child, that the boy's mind was strangely unimpressible, that there seemed no affinity between the religious truth and his heart; that it took no hold of a mind, keen and retentive of all other truth? He was not a bad child, not wild, not disobedient, a boy of fine feeling, high-minded, truthful, honourable; but to make him markedly religious seemed beyond you; and you were content, at last, to wait and to hope that there was some good thing in him toward God.

This was precisely the character of Saul. He was, in the highest sense, what we term a man of honour. All the qualities that go to make up a chivalrous character were united in him. He was gallant, brave, liberal, right royal. He was a goodly man in his person; and his qualities of mind and heart corre-

sponded to his outward appearance. Consider his modesty when destined to the throne, how on his return he told his relative about finding the asses, but said not a word about the kingdom; and, when the day of election came, he hid himself away, and could not be found. Consider his soldierly courage and chivalry, and how, even on the field of Gilboa, his last act of self-destruction was done at the bidding of a fastidious honour, lest the unclean hands of the uncircumcised Philistines should abuse him. Consider his almost immaculate moral life, so singular in an Oriental ruler, and in such contrast with the life even of his successor; and yet so ruthlessly did fate pursue him, and so sure is any breach, even the least, of the law of God and nature to avenge itself, that the one concubine whom he had, became on his death the centre of a most tragic history.

Consider Saul's tenderness and compunction and bitterness of regret, when he saw David's generosity in sparing his life; and how, when he heard the voice of the young soldier who had gone down with him into some of the darkest abysses of his life, and had, by his skill, enlightened the gloom, and restored again to unity the broken fragments of his mind, he lifted up his voice, and wept, and turned back for ever from persecuting him. Oh most perplexed life! A man struggling with a task beyond him, called to a destiny above him, confronted, as we all are, with the things of a spiritual life, and bidden do his part by them,

and feeling his inability, and taking his inability to heart, his mind became unstrung; and, instead of the sweet music of reason, we hear the dissonance of jangled bells, all out of tune and harsh.

It does seem, sometimes, that Providence chastises small sins more than large; that, like society, it revenges itself more upon a peccadillo than on a great breach of the moral law. That scrupulous, conscientious person who received the one talent and hid it in a napkin, but restored it entire, though not increased—who did not do what was right, out of fear lest he should not do right enough—was hardly dealt with. Providence is very rigid. And no doubt it takes occasion of small offences to exact a stern retribution, in order to teach us, whose minds are so blunt, and whose consciences are so easy, its dreadful rigidity and sternness.

When Samuel uttered his threat of reprobation against Saul, the king said, "I have sinned: . . . Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel . . . . Then Saul said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord."

This is a strange scene. These were two men—men, the highest then living in the commonwealth of Israel and the kingdom of God. Was the act of either of them a little act? Was it a petty thing in Saul, to make this request, and a mere piece of good nature in Samuel to gratify him? These men had been friends for long: they knew one another. Saul knew Samuel and the meaning of his words right well. He knew they meant all they expressed, his utter reprobation from the kingdom of God, and the loss of the throne to his descendants for ever. And Samuel knew what this conveyed to that keen, ambitious, kingly mind of Saul. We are sometimes the instruments of crushing out a human mind, sometimes, alas, wrongly; and sometimes, in God's direct providence. Yet no one, though he may do it in passion, or in thoughtlessness, or even in duty, but feels it all his life through as the weightiest burden that lies on him. Samuel had done this to Saul, his brother in all the high purposes of Israel, the kingdom of God—he had crushed out Saul's mind. And, in the excitement of his zeal, his first instinct was to abandon Saul on the spot, and break for ever the tie that had long bound them. But a lifetime's fellowship cannot be smothered up in a moment of religious excitement. Samuel's better feelings prevailed. Had he turned his back on this poor reprobate in the moment of his reprobation, and showed, in the broad eye of mankind and his friends the elders, what he

thought of him and what he was doomed to, had he let him down before the vulgar stare of the men of Israel, he himself would not have stood out, before our mind, as the glorified ideal of that calm, considerate, compassionate mind, which is proper to one who was the greatest judge in Israel.

And was it petty in Saul to ask this of Samuel? It was very human. It was very Saul-like. Did he ask it because he was insensible to what Samuel said, or sceptical of it, or because he felt the applause of men to be dearer than the favour of God? None of all these things. Or did he do it merely out of the desire to keep up appearances? Not that altogether either, although keeping up appearances, in the more serious matters of human life, seems to me a very beautiful thing. It is a very profound confession to the depth of life, especially to the tragical in it. We agree, by common consent, not to be aware of a whole current that runs below what is seen in human life. We meet with men in whose histories tragedies have occurred, deeper than they acknowledge or give out to the world. We know how things are. But we meet them, and condole on the more superficial understanding. They hide, and we do not uncover, the real sorrow that lives in their heart.

But, in Saul's case, the request to Samuel was due rather to the king's sense of propriety, to that feeling of dignity, and of what was becoming, which was so characteristic of him. This implied, if not a forgetting,

yet a smothering and keeping down, of his own personal interest. He was not unnerved by Samuel's denunciation of him. The very tremendousness of the sentence strung every nerve within him. He was strong. He did not go howling through the camp of Israel, like a dog at which someone has cast a stone, bewailing his fate, and flinging down the reins of government, in order to lament over his personal rejection. He had duties as well as interests. The greatness of his personal calamity perhaps made him rise above what was personal, and gave his mind a wider view, and imparted depth and fertility to his feelings.

In the lives of many men there comes a moment like this which had come on Saul. It came, perhaps, to many of the patriarchs. It came to Moses, when debarred from the promised land; and it comes to many of us—a moment when it is made clear to us that we are not going to receive that which we had set our heart upon, or make that out of life which we hoped to make, or attain really to that which our circumstances, to set out with, gave promise of—a moment when we are told, as clearly as by a voice from heaven, that we shall not rise to that position in the world, or among men, or in the Church of God, that we had looked forward to; that we shall not lead, or even be a part of, that movement of thought from one degree of truth to a higher, or from one degree of attainment in Christian life to a greater, which we once thought of; that, when that advance is made, no one will think of us in connexion

with it: or when we feel that that evil in us, which we had struggled against and prayed to have removed, and which we know to be the bar to our true influence, will not yield in this life, and are made conscious that we must stand aside and take a lower place, or, like one who has become lame in the march, fall out of the rank, and let the glorious array pass by us. There comes such a moment to us, I say, as it came to Saul, and as it came to Moses; and though others do not know it, yet God makes known to us the cause of it, what incapacity it is in us, or what unadvised word or false step it was, that loses to us the harvest of our hopes. Yet surely even then we are not going to go moaning through the world, or become paralysed and feeble, and let our hands hang down. Rather let us accept our destiny as what God adjudges to us, and strive to do what we still can, losing ourselves as much as we can in the general thought of God and man, and the great interests of life, in which we shall have some share still, although not that high one which we dreamed of having.

Now as to the lessons of this history of Saul's, it is scarcely needful to particularise them. They silently present themselves. Such a life cannot be read without affecting us. If we learned nothing more from it but what we cannot help at least feeling, namely, the sorrowfulness of this human life—the broad, general, and, upon the whole, entire failure of it—we should not have read it in vain. And also the misery of it

It was not a failure that thought itself a success—only small minds perhaps can fancy such a thing, as, perhaps, only great minds can think success failure. But here was a great mind knowing its failure, conscious of its incapacity, yet resenting it, mad against circumstances and men and Providence, not going out like a slowly smouldering fire, but burning out like a volcano.

It is not amiss for us just to stand before this spectacle of a great human misery, a perplexed, unhappy life, even where we should have supposed all the elements of happiness were present. Such a sight gives us thoughts of life not without use to us, and makes us wonder at the elements of misery inwrought into it; and life becomes to us something more mysterious, greater, less trivial: and the higher the mind, and the more lofty the part in life, the more and greater seem to be the possibilities of wretchedness. Life seems at first sight like the bright sunlight, one single element of brightness; yet, when in maturer years we analyse it, we discover it to be made up of many varied colours; and, between the colours, there are dark, unresolvable lines, that will yield to no analysis. In human life there are mysterious veins of misery, do what you will.

Yet we might stand too long, filling our minds with this sight of a vague human misery, so great, in this man's case, as to seem even beyond human. We must ask the reason of it. And some part of the reason we can see. It arose from the unfitness of Saul for the

great place he occupied. He wanted the one quality necessary for success and happiness. He was king in the kingdom of God; and he failed to comprehend the meaning of that kingdom. He never rose to the full conception of what God's kingdom was, and demanded. He had never thought himself, or felt himself, into it. It always stood outside of him, as something which he could not realise. He was conscious of this; and he betrays his consciousness in the way he spoke to Samuel. He felt that Samuel stood to the Lord in different relations from himself; and he always speaks to him of "the Lord thy God." His very honesty hinders him from saying, "the Lord my God."

Saul's failure was conspicuous, because he occupied a very conspicuous place. Every eye could see it. Yet our own failure may be as real, though not so visible; and to the interests committed to us, it may be as disastrous, and bring to us a most overwhelming misery. Saul began well. He had the Spirit of God. He was changed into another man. The hard soil of his mind was broken up, and a blessed seed sown in it. He rose for a time to conceptions befitting his place; but there was not a change deep enough to fit him for his high office; and his fall was calamitous and awful, like the fall of a bright star from the heavens. But the same unfitness and the same miserable end are seen in a hundred ways among ourselves. We see, for example, a young man standing on the threshold of some office in the Church. He is fired for a time by

the thought of it, and rises up to be, for the moment, not unworthy of it. His name is mentioned with respect, and he leads others to truth; and great hopes are entertained of him. Yet there was a fundamental unworthiness. A few years after, his enthusiasm has cooled down, and his fervour is quenched; and hidden vices begin to show themselves; and, with advancing years, he sinks down deeper and deeper, till every moral spring seems dried within him, and he is the contempt of all who observe him.

We are all called to take some place; and accumulated miseries fall on us, and all about us, when we are not baptized with the true spirit of that place. When one is a mother, for instance, and thinks that most sacred relation has no higher duties than to train her child to look out for a high place in the world, deeming purity, and affection, and the voice of nature, things all very well for ideal compositions such as the Bible, but which one cannot afford to attend to in this life, as we have to lead it. To be a father without the qualities needful in a father, the sense of responsibility to God the Father of all, the sobriety needful as an example, the piety needful in one who has to train souls, and who, intrusted with the yet flexible and unformed souls of his children, has virtually, we may say, their everlasting destinies in his hand,—to be a king without the virtue of royalty, the honour and magnanimity, the superiority to pettiness and to all that is mean in amusement or in life, and the ability to close the ear to cabals and party

misrepresentation,—or even to be what we all call ourselves, and which is something higher still, *Christians*, without the spirit of Christ, without the serious consistency which such a name as Christian, with such a history as it suggests, makes becoming, and the constant anxiety which we should have to commend Christ, by our demeanour, as the only way of life, since to every one of us Christ has said, "As My Father has sent Me into the world, even so send I you,"—to be any of all these things without the spirit becoming them, what disastrous failure must be the consequence, and what pungent misery at the end!

Yet perhaps we should miss something of the real tragedy of Saul's life, something of that mysteriousness which gives it such interest, if we failed to connect it with a higher power, with God's providence and determination to make him king. It is this that gives it its true tragical interest. Our destinies are not altogether in our own hands. We cannot do everything by the mere force of our own will. There is something above our will, moving us and using us for purposes that are wider than our own immediate failure or success.

Saul did not desire the throne. He hid himself when the question came on. He had no wish for it. But it was thrust upon him. In God's providence he was put into it, incapable as he was. His very incapacity fitted him best for it. For the very glaringness of the failure drew attention to the loftiness of the office. God gave

men an idea of what He required, by showing how disastrously this king came short of it. Saul fell, and broke himself to pieces; and men could not but cast up their eyes, to gaze at the awful height whence he had fallen. I think it useful to say this, because there is a way of thinking common, as if we ourselves could do everything, as if the human will were fit for all things. There is something before the human will, and that is, God's purpose. I daresay God sometimes uses us Christians to illustrate Christianity in this way. He shows how great the demands of Christianity are, by the very little way the best of us go towards fulfilling them.

This does not mean, of course, that God uses us for general purposes, irrespective of our own personal interests. No. What is peculiar in God's use of us is, that it is always both general and particular. He uses us for the influencing of all, but always, also, in such a way as to influence ourselves. Saul was used to teach a great lesson to the Church of God, and to the world: to show what profound qualities the king of God's kingdom needs, what consecration to God, what perfect obedience and spirituality; and Saul's failure taught this more conspicuously than his success would have done. But he was not used as a mere dead thing, irrespective of his own interests.

But he who fails as king, may be successful as subject. Saul was too little religious, too ignorant of the principles of the kingdom of God, to be king; but he

may have had knowledge enough to be, if we might say so, an indifferent subject. And, in order to justify God's ways to man, we must ask, How did he attain this? By being chosen king. Religion was forced upon his attention. He had to take it in, in some degree. In a sufficient degree he could not — yet in some measure he did—in such measure as to take some place, low or high, in the kingdom of God, unfit as he was to rule it. What might he have been, if left in his father's house a mere subject? The want of religion might never have reached him. He might have died, an unawakened, untouched mind, engaged in secular pursuits, a noble, high-minded, chivalrous man, but wholly ungodly. For we know how difficult it is to stir a people to its deeps religiously, how the popular mind is like deep waters; tempests may rage on the surface, but the commotion does not go down to the lower strata. I do not speak of the lowest, of those degraded beings who stare at us from the mouths of closes, brutalised with lust and intemperance. I speak of the great mass of the people, engrossed in life, alienated from religion, interested only in their own little circle and neighbourhood, or, at most, in the place which the country takes among other nations, and in the political struggles of the day; of those over whom the great revolutions of mind may pass unheeded, or even unknown. Saul might have remained such a man, following the plough, had he not been called to the kingdom. But there, other thoughts must be forced upon him, and the

hard soil of his mind had to be torn up; and, though a warning to others, he was not merely experimented upon, but instructed himself.

There is a gleam of returning light, which I think bears out this view, in Saul's last act. I do not speak of its chivalry, or of its sorrowful self-denial, how after he was reprobated from being king, he did not pettishly renounce the duties of the kingdom, but loyally clung to his post, forgetting all personal feelings, and losing himself in the higher thought of a public duty. He did not renounce the claims of life on him, though life had nought now to give him. Nor did he go through them with a sickly, lackadaisical air. Nay, on his last battle-field, he was as chivalrous as ever; his old fire was not dimmed. And yet it was the morrow of that awful night, when his reprobation was renewed to him even from the dead, and his certain death on that very field foretold. This is rare self-denial, rare kingliness, rare greatness of mind—Jonathan and he—father and son in one act of self-immolation. Well might David cry, "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you." Surely this greedy earth, that has supped upon the blood of so many heroic hearts, never drank in nobler blood than this.

But this is not that to which I now refer. This does display a noble mind, a mind that seems to have recovered all its old nobleness. But even that act, the night before, has its good side. We condemn his seeking for the living to the dead. We smile at it. In the

superior conceit which comes nowadays from a little more knowledge, and a little less sense of the supernatural, we often smile at the display of great moral qualities and profound emotions, because combined with some superstition. In his last extremity, the king sought Samuel, the friend of his early rule, the man who had first spoken to him from God. His mind was coming back to old times; old principles, even in such a haze of superstitions, were beginning to show themselves, like stars coming out through the clouds; what he might have been, was showing itself and making an effort still to be: he was striving to be again that other man, which the Holy Spirit had made him in the beginning of his rule.

Alas! it was in vain. But how often on deathbeds this is so. It is perhaps not uncommon, when life draws near a close, when the dial goes back the ten or forty or fifty degrees of life, that youthful principles and resolves shine out again, even amidst shattered capacities and decaying nature. Alas, they do not come back now to be followed; they do not come back to project a life, and enable us to realise it. They come back as shadows of lost possibilities, as phantoms which are but reflections of early visions that were filled with promise, phantoms which utter only one hollow voice—"It might have been! it might have been!"

Yet it is possible that the result may be otherwise. We do not know the power of early memories of the truth; we do not know to what uses the Spirit of God may turn them even in the last moments of life; and

whether what we look upon as the throes of death, be not also the pangs of another birth. "The wind bloweth where it listeth: and so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

At all events, it is not for us to censure but to pity. Subsequent Scripture has no word of censure for Saul. It says only that God took away His mercy from him, that he should be no more king—nothing more. He was the first king of God's kingdom; and we desire to think that, having such a place, he was not cast away. We leave his faults where we leave our own—at the feet of the true King of the kingdom of God, who did not leave the kingdom a ruin, as Saul did, but who established it with judgment and justice from henceforth even for ever; and who is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

VI

ELIJAH'S FLIGHT

VI

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1 KINGS xix.

THIS event in the life of Elijah is one that took place a great while ago. The circumstances in which it happened may seem very unlike our own; and Elijah himself, to whom it happened, was so different from ourselves and so far above us, that, all things considered, little instruction may be expected to be derivable from this or any part of his history. The only feeling he is fitted to excite may seem to be wonder. When we come upon him in the pages of the Bible, it is like coming upon a skeleton of superhuman size, or upon a gigantic suit of ancient armour—we can only express astonishment at the greatness and the strength of men of former times. Well, if this were the only feeling which this history raised, it might not be amiss to entertain it for a time in our minds.

The feeling of wonder at the greatness of others is a very wholesome feeling, and is closely connected with another equally salutary, the feeling of sadness at our own littleness. Yet the greatness of this prophet need

not be any obstacle in the way of our deriving benefit from his history. Rather, it should be helpful to us. For just as, if we were examining the joints and mechanism and the adaptations of the human body, the body of a giant would present them to us in their fullest and most visible form, so, in a very great mind, we shall be able to see most clearly the movements of the mind, its strength and joy, as well as its weakness and despondency.

The only part of the prophet's history, which can be touched upon, is his flight to Sinai; and, even in that, only a few of the more obvious points which have a practical bearing.

I. The circumstances of Elijah's time.

These circumstances were full of interest. There had always been, in Israel, an idolatrous, disbelieving party. The nation's history, throughout its whole length, shows a polluted stream of idolatrous worship running side by side with the true worship of Jehovah; and sometimes this idolatrous current became so broad, that it gave its own colour to the whole stream of the people's religious life. They were idolaters in Ur of the Chaldees—"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the Flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham; and they served other gods." They were idolaters in Egypt. In the wilderness their idolatry broke out when they joined themselves unto Baal-Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. They were idolaters in Canaan. Even David's wife, the daughter of Saul, possessed idols,

with one of which she deceived the hired assassins of her father, and saved her husband's life.

The idolatrous elements were numerous and pervaded every class in the nation, and only awaited some hand skilful and strong enough to combine them, in order to acquire the command of the people's thoughts, and assume the place of the national faith. This was found in Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and her feeble husband Ahab. The latter appears to have been not so much vicious as weak, one who, like a spoilt child, when refused his wishes, fell sick and would not eat. And thus he fell completely under the guidance of his unscrupulous wife. At her instigation, he introduced the worship of Baal—"he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke Jehovah the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." He made Baal-worship a State religion. But he went further. He was not satisfied with toleration for himself. He sought to suppress all other worships. He issued orders for the murder of Jehovah's prophets, and the throwing down of His altars. And, with a fatal fickleness and subserviency, the people, for the most part, gave in to the despotic will of the effeminate tyrant. Elijah pleaded this condition of things before the Lord in the wilderness: "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left:

and they seek my life." The country was passing through a religious crisis, and there could be seen that sifting of men which goes on at such a time.

There were, as on all such occasions, three parties—the true worshippers of Jehovah, the strict idolaters, and the middlemen who were neither. These last were no doubt the most numerous. Perhaps the body of the people belonged to this class—men, as Elijah described them, who halted or limped between two opinions—men not firm on their legs, but limping, being neither worshippers of Jehovah nor good idolaters. Some belonged to this class, because they thought it safest to side with the majority; some, because the problem presented to them was too difficult for their solution, and they were unable to decide, being drawn sometimes to one side and sometimes to another. And others belonged to this great middle party on principle, just because it was a middle party. "They disliked extremes," they said. "In every matter there was a great deal not essential, and men ruined their own cause by their offensive stickling for this. The worship of Jehovah was no doubt essentially the true religion. And its supporters might be excellent men, but they were certainly narrow. If they insisted less on names, and forms, and definitions, it would be well. If they were more tolerant, and accepted the good that was in all men,—might it not even be said, in all things,—and the deep religious feeling that was in all men's hearts, even if the form in which it showed itself externally was not always to their

liking, they would make much greater way, and find their usefulness much enlarged. It must be admitted that the old forms of Jehovah-worship, which suited a rude people in the wilderness, might not be adapted to the feelings of an accomplished and educated nation, that had enjoyed permanent empire for six hundred years. Religious teaching must be accommodated somewhat to the wants and relations of the age. And it was new to them to hear that all that was to be attained of truth and goodness among men had already been found, and was to be had, embalmed, in the practices of their own particular religion. It seemed certainly possible that some other portion of mankind, even Sidon, had found something good, which they had missed; and this fanatical closing up of every inlet against the thought and the belief of every portion of the race besides themselves, was surely a mistake."

Such was, perhaps, something like the state of parties and of feelings, that existed at this time. It was a time of confusion and breaking up of old beliefs. Cross-currents were running, and eddies that caught men and whirled them about. And many were satisfied, and believed that thought was advancing, and freedom gaining ground. The waves were so broken that the real direction of the currents was not seen. Perhaps few discerned what was really at stake. One mind at least took in the whole meaning of the issue. Elijah was not blinded by the way men have of speaking of religion, when they say it is an inward thing, a kind of feeling; and that, if

the feeling be right, it matters little what the external object is, that creates it. To him, the external object was all: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve: if Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." He knew that, according to the external object, so, very soon, will be the feelings and the life of the worshipper.

Elijah, whether of set purpose, or under a sudden impulse, permitted himself on Carmel to use force. He met the king's violence with equal violence of his own. Perhaps no other course was left him. But more likely it was a mistake. Yet, in the full tide of excitement, and with the multitude at his back, the temptation was very great. But he might have remembered that the multitude would be at anyone's back who would show them force, particularly of a rude kind. And though at his back to-day, they might be at Jezebel's to-morrow. And so they were; and the crowd that, under the influence of his great miracle, confessed their faith on Carmel with such fervour, crying, "Jehovah, He is God; Jehovah, He is God"—bowed, submissive, to Jezebel's threat to take the prophet's life in Samaria: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by to-morrow about this time. And Elijah rose and went for his life."

II. The circumstances of Elijah's flight and his despondency.

Elijah fled. That was necessary. He fled into the wilderness, not to Sidon as he had done before, not to any of the neighbouring peoples, nor beyond Jordan

—but to the wilderness. That is where you expect him to flee to. In any moment of his life the wilderness was congenial to him. Its bleakness and isolation were but the counterparts of his own mind. His favourite abode was by the brook Cherith, with only the monotonous rush of waters in his ear, among the silent hills. For company he preferred the ravens to men. Among men he seemed alone. His greatness made him solitary. There are some men solitary for other reasons, just as there are some mountains. Some hills stand alone, though they are not great. The forces of nature and time have carried away what surrounded and touched them, and have left them solitary. And circumstances sometimes alienate or remove men's associates from them; and they stand apart, not possessing, whether they seek it or not, the confidence of others. But some mountains stand alone because of their grandeur. Giant hills crowd about the foot of Mont Blanc; yet, in the midst of them, he is alone. They cannot reach the same altitude as he; they go with him but a little way. Into the regions of cloud and sky into which he towers, they cannot rise. And thus it is with the highest minds. In common things others can accompany them. They can be followed to a certain height, but then other men and they part company. In those lofty regions where only heaven is around — in dense clouds or divine light—they stand solitary. And, being alone even in the midst of men, they naturally seek solitude.

But Elijah fled to the wilderness of Sinai. That also was characteristic. Sinai is the wilderness of wildernesses. On the back of natural terrors, moral terrors are accumulated. There Jehovah, before whom Elijah stood, showed Himself most clearly. That side of God, which Elijah had most sympathy with, was most fully manifested there. Elijah was the prophet of Law, of force, of terror. And he longed to realise the Lord more fully. He would penetrate into the very place of terrors. He would see the mountain where the Law was given, its rugged front, once veiled in awful smoke, and its long fissures which might have been ploughed by the very lightnings of that dreadful day. Might it not be that Jehovah Himself would appear to him as to Moses.

I think men flee there still, when they are wearied with the indifference and vexed with the laxness of those about them. There is an asperity in their frame of mind, a fierce earnestness, a longing, stimulated perhaps by opposition, for a sight of truth as it is; and that easy-going acceptance of it, which satisfies most men, they will not put up with. And it is the severer forms of truth that we then desire—law, right, justice, a word of God pure and simple. And our toleration for men whose thinking tends to soften truth, to rub away the edges of sharp doctrines, to run every doctrine into a region over which falls a mist of uncertainty, saying "this is mystery—this ends in God—we do not know, we can only guess"—our toleration for minds of this class is then very little. Their hesitation or reserve seems to us

but inconsequence or sluggishness; and our mind, with its keen dogmatic edge, will have no compromise: our cry is Sinai, Law.

This is the great evil of religious controversy. It drives men to extremes. It exaggerated the natural one-sidedness of Elijah. It made one who was a zealot by nature almost a fanatic. It nursed and enlarged the austere, harsh, unhuman, solitary side of his nature; and threw him into cold, unfeeling antagonism to all the ways of life, and all the movements of the minds of ordinary men. And it had just the same effect on them. They dreaded him, and were repelled by him. They instinctively felt that his religion was an exaggeration, and his character in some way unhuman. And therefore they clung the more to their own too human kind of thinking. Their soft, sensual religion became all the dearer to them. Or their minds were unsettled; and they wavered between one thing and another, acknowledging his power, but feeling the want of anything that could win them over to his side. It was impossible to go his length.

On his way towards Sinai, somewhere about the wilderness of Beersheba, in the south of Palestine, there fell upon Elijah that despair and singular weariness of life, which we wonder so much at in him—which we wonder at, but gladly accept—for it is the touch of nature that makes him and us kin. He came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take

away my life." Some part of this despondency might be due to physical weakness, for he fled for his life. But it was almost altogether spiritual. This was the morrow after the day of his transcendent success on Carmel. The tide of spiritual power had never risen so high, even in his soul, as it had done on Carmel. God had never obeyed him so implicitly as then, and that, too, in the presence both of royalty and the masses of the nation. Never before had he felt so confident, and wielded, with such absolute mastery, his sway over men's minds. Never perhaps before had such thoughts risen in his mind as rose then, of a kingdom conquered for Jehovah, and a nation born in an hour, and a realm cleansed from all impurities, and every knee bowed to the Lord. Victory for Jehovah was secure; and he was the conqueror.

That was yesterday. And to-day, spiritual reaction has set in in his own soul; and he is a fugitive, crouching under a bush in the wilderness. The facile crowd has returned to its impure rites again, not one voice daring to raise itself on the Lord's side—the kingdom which seemed the Lord's not merely thrown back, but hopelessly Baal's; and all his efforts lost. No wonder that complete prostration overtook him, and that he requested for himself that he might die. It is a hard moment in a man's life this—such as had now come upon Elijah, when a man has given the energy of his life to one cherished purpose, and has hoped for it, patiently waiting till the years should roll past when

the promised prize should fall to him, enduring many hardships, cheered by the prospect, ever coming nearer, of success, and refusing to let himself think of defeat,—it is a hard moment when, at last, through some perversity of will in one whom he has trusted, or some unworthiness of others, or some great miscalculation, defeat ensues, just when victory has been judged secure: and the once compact purpose of his life is broken into pieces, like fragments of a vanquished host which no commander can ever rally or unite.

At such a time only this remains to him—that he judged it truth for which he struggled, and that the means he used seemed to him the best, or at least worthy; and this—that at any rate God remains to him, to whom he can appeal to judge his cause, and, if he has fought in vain, to release him from the unavailing strife. "Now, Lord, take away my life." A modern martyr dies appealing to posterity, invoking the judgment of the future. When prejudice and passion shall be no more, and truth shall have freer scope, then his cause, misjudged now, shall be held just; and his name, that goes down dishonoured now, shall shine with a perpetual lustre. So it has often been found to be; succeeding generations look back with wonder upon the mistakes and blindness of former times. And so it has come to be a settled belief that all, who have done great deeds, shall yet, even here, receive the just award of praise or blame; and men who are conscious to themselves of insight or power can, when misjudged, make

their appeal without fear to the better informed judgment of the time to come. But perhaps, in Elijah's days, this general truth had hardly been gained. At least, there is no sign that the thought at all sustained him; rather, all seemed to him lost, and he longed to die.

In such moments men do not think. Neither can they look beyond the present. Neither is there any consistency in their feelings. God remained to Elijah; and yet God's cause seemed irretrievably lost. The truth is, his mind was quite disorganised. Like a warrior who has waged all day an unequal strife, and at the last received a mortal stroke, he retires from the field to die alone; and when the languor is falling on him, he says, "Now, O Lord, take away my life."

III. God's treatment of His desponding servant.

God first gave him bodily food, for that was needful. Then, in the strength of the bread given him, he went unto Horeb the mount of God. God gratified his longings. He satisfied his spiritual aspirations. That which he so greatly desired to see, God showed to him. He took him up to the very height, and down to the very deeps, of that kind of realising of Himself which he longed to attain to. God, as conceived by him and as his heart delighted in, was shown him in perfection. Yea, for Elijah's sake, God almost re-enacted the terrors of Sinai. "A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earth-

quake ; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire." Sinai over again, and the Lord not in it all! Was it for this he had come so far? Was this the fulfilling of the dream of his life, and the reward of his unexampled might and toil? "And after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle."

This is the divine method of teaching. Its full meaning may be beyond us. But it pointed backward to Elijah's past career, and it pointed onward to one who should use no force, who should not cry nor lift up, nor let His voice be heard in the streets. Elijah's methods were tried on himself—power, force, law, Sinai. And the effects were nought. The Lord was not in the earthquake nor in the fire. Did the prophet wonder now at the obdurate king, at the besotted people, at the fickle crowd, at the mad vindictive queen? What had he been plying them with, all his days? With miracle on miracle, a gloomy demeanour, heavens of brass, famine, thirst, death, with law and force. Does he wonder at the result now, after his present experience? Or is not his wonder rather turned in upon himself? He had been enabled to sound the deeps of that conception of God, which had all his life fascinated him; he had come to His chosen place, and he found that God was something different from his idea of Him, and that His highest power was not of the kind he imagined.

May we not learn something from this? Does not

the conception of God, which any of us has, need to be supplemented? Do we not work somewhat too much on one idea of Him, thinking it perhaps a full one; and, in consequence, our work is less successful than it should be. Perhaps with some of us it is the same defect as marked Elijah's; we rather still adhere to the God of Sinai. Yet there must have been a parable to Elijah in this earthquake and this fire which were powerless, followed by the small voice in which was God Himself—a parable of Sinai and Calvary. And might there not rise up before him some such scene as he was yet to witness and to share on the Mount of Transfiguration, when the thunders of Sinai should die down, and become lower and lower through successive ages, till at last they were succeeded by the still small voice of one who "did not cry nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street," but who was "God with us," "unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." "For what the law could not do"—even though wielded by an Elijah —"God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin," did—"condemn sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

Now, despite Elijah's despondency, the Lord sent him back to his work as soon as was possible, saying: "Go, return: and when thou comest, thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and

Elisha the son of Shaphat shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." Elijah's work was not done. Though weary of the world, he must face it; must handle its forces as he finds them, and do his best to direct them. He must not recoil from meeting open foes like Hazael, and superficial reformers like Jehu. There they are, and the servant of God must use them for the best; he must mix with them, study them, comprehend them, declare God's will to them, and use them for the Church's advancement. Action, not despondency, is demanded. For there is no reason to despair. We are often cast down with our small success, and ready to fling away the weapons of our warfare, and acknowledge defeat. But Elijah's history shows that success is often much greater than appearances would suggest. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." No influences can be quite lost; only their result is not immediate: "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud; so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth."

Perhaps all God's servants do more work than they imagine. Elijah thought he had saved his own soul only. God showed him seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And as God's servants do more than they think they are doing, so they will find God putting upon them at the last an unexpected honour, an exceeding weight of glory. This temporary

darkness in Elijah's life was swallowed up in the light of the end. The honour God put upon him in the latter days was unspeakable, when he stood beside the Son on the Mount of Transfiguration. Hence it seems that wherein men fail is forgotten by God; and wherein they succeed is the measure of glory that is bestowed on them.

The influence of a true man of God is profound. Elijah thought his influence fleeting and superficial; but it was deep and prevailing. Two brief reigns passed over, one of two years and the other of twelve; and then the harvest began to be reaped. The nation was full of the spirit of mutiny against the bloody and idolatrous house of Ahab. And when the prophet went to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi, so ripe was the time for a change, that the army immediately hailed the new monarch, crying, "God save King Jehu!" And the carnage that followed in Ahab's house was terrible and complete. And the religious as well as political revolution that followed was thorough.

It was Elijah's spirit working in men—in the army, among the citizens, in the prophets that came after him, in the Rechabites—the severe, pure monotheistic spirit, the spirit of the truth, the spirit which is omnipotent, when it rises in the hearts of a people. Ah! it is not in Parliaments or on battlefields that deeds are done that are great in God's sight; it is rather on that stage which, to men's eyes, seems narrow, but is the widest of all, where individual human souls

are engaged in playing out the great drama of their own immortal destiny, rejecting or accepting, amidst the manifold struggles of mind, the truth which God is presenting to them.

Elijah's despair was due largely to his loneliness, to his having to fight the battle of the Lord single-handed. And Elijah was a giant such as men are not now; and yet the forces of the enemy were too strong for him. He had not the support of the people. There were many that agreed with him so far; a number that agreed with him out and out. There were many meek, mute souls throughout the land, that wished him well. But they wanted courage. Their feelings and their sympathies were right; but they were not the men that soldiers in God's cause are made of. And of the most it had to be said, that they wanted one thing. They were not firm in their principles. They halted between two opinions.

This lesson goes deep. To-day you may be enthusiastic. Your sympathies are aglow. And you feel that it is a great cause, as great, because really the same, as that which Elijah represented—the cause of the one, true, living God against all denials of Him or all substitutes for Him; the cause of a pure morality in the land, inseparably connected with a pure worship; the cause of the independence of religion, free from control and manipulation for State purposes by civil rulers, whether they be fools like Ahab, or harlots like

Jezebel, or whatever they may be; the cause of the existence of true religion in every heart and home in the country,—it is the same cause now as then,—all this you may feel anew; and you may believe that the feeling will remain. So did the fickle crowd on Carmel, on the day of the gladness of Elijah's heart. But on the morrow they feared to lift a finger for him. They did not perceive the need of action, because they did not comprehend the principles at stake. To them it was but the question whether the queen or the prophet should prove the stronger. If those set over us are to be successful, we must stand by them, I do not say, in every opinion which they may hold or express, but in the great principles which move their lives, and for which they have to contend.

Spiritual teachers in all ages have perhaps fallen into the error of Elijah. They have exaggerated; they have gone into extremes, into which those whom they taught could not follow them. It is not necessary to follow them into their extremes. But these extremes are greatly due to their feeling of being isolated, and to the seemingly immovable insensibility of those whom they have to instruct. Cordial co-operation, cordial sympathy in the great general truths of the Faith, will remove these feelings and these exaggerations. And then Christian teaching will become calm, and simple, and natural; and the stream of Christian truth and life, instead of being like a noisy, furious, foaming brook, dashing itself against everything within

its reach, will advance like a great, broad, placid river, without a wave upon its surface, absorbing into itself, from all sides, every contribution of the thought and life of men, and moving on with a power that nothing can resist.

VII

THE CALL OF ISAIAH

VII

THE CALL OF ISAIAH

Isaiah vi

This passage consists of a series of steps, each one of which naturally follows upon the other. There is first a vision of God, surprising and majestic, with a singular world of beings and activities around Him. Then this vision of God re-acts upon the mind of the prophet, and makes him think of himself, and of his relation to this King whom he had seen; and one thought succeeds another, so that he lives, in a moment, a history. Then having passed through this history, the beginning of which was terror but the end peace, he experienced an altogether new sensation, as if the world, which was all disorder and confusion before, a medley of conflicting interests and passions, had suddenly become clear, and the meaning of it plain, so that he now saw what was his own place in it, and felt an irresistible impulse to take that place at once. This is expressed by saying that Isaiah heard the voice of the great King, whom he had seen, proclaiming that He had need of some one, and by Isaiah's answer that he was the person needed,

and could supply the need. And finally, there comes the service which he has to do; which of course is no other than just to take his place in the midst of that world, the meaning of which was now made clear to him, and to state this meaning to men, to hold the mirror up to his time, and declare to it its condition, and its tendencies, and what the issue of that and of all should be.

I. The Vision of Jehovah the King: "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up."

This chapter contains in all probability the inaugural vision of the prophet, that which accompanied and formed his call to be a prophet. All the great prophets —Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—had such a vision of Jehovah, the God of Israel. They were prophets of the Lord, their message was from Him; and it was chiefly about Him that they spoke to the people. And it was needful that they should see and clearly know Him of whom they spoke. It was needful, for their own assurance that they were His true prophets, and to uphold them against the contradictions of men, and give them an invincible fortitude and conviction, that at the beginning they should be drawn close to Jehovah Himself, and be assured that He was, and that He was the King. Having thus seen Him in His glory, they came forth from His presence with an awe upon them that never left them, and a force of conviction that never deserted them, and with the feel-

ing of an imperative necessity lying on them to speak His word to men, which they could not themselves resist.

It was in the year that king Uzziah died that this strange sight was seen by this inhabitant of Jerusalem. Most probably it was soon after the king died, perhaps immediately after. For though, in the general heading of the prophecies, Isaiah is said to have prophesied in the days of Uzziah, that heading is not to be pressed so far as to make it assert that he had actually prophesied in the lifetime of Uzziah; what is meant is, that his prophetic ministry extended all through the reign of Jotham, even from the very year that king Uzziah died. This inaugural vision and prophecy was given so near the death of Uzziah that it might be said to be in the days of that renowned king. Perhaps it was given immediately after his death; it might be when, though dead, he had not yet been laid in the grave. It was a vision that might well have been suggested by such a momentous death, the death of one once a king, and one so powerful, holding such a place among the forces of society, bridling them with so firm a hand, a hand now relaxed, leaving the unquiet humours of the land to assert themselves, and draw the State on to its destruction.

We might even fancy, without unduly stretching fancy, that Isaiah, who, though not yet a prophet, appears to have been a citizen of high rank, and perhaps familiar at the court, had this vision presented to him

a little after he had come out of the royal chamber where the deceased monarch lay in state. Perhaps he had been permitted to enter along with the common crowd of subjects, who pressed in to render their last act of homage; and though he had seemed to walk round the bier, and linger a moment to look upon the still face, as mechanically as any of them, it was with very different thoughts in his heart. It was a dead king that lay before him. And though the presence of death in any form might have suggested the first half of the vision—the unseen world within this world—only the sight of a dead king could have led Isaiah's mind to draw that comprehensive sketch of the history and the destiny of his nation, with which the chapter ends. Those eternal, changeless sights are reflected in the face, rapt but unmoved; the grandeur, the unchanging flow of eternity, the awful face of God, holding the mind in an absorbed stillness, so that emotion ebbs and flows no more in the heart, and no more plays upon the countenance, but all is still.

Now when the prophet came out from the presence of the dead, musing on all things as he must have mused, and probably entering the temple where the service of God was going on—for the vision is just the reflection of the service of God in His house upon earth, it is only this service translated into its real meaning—it is not unnatural that such a vision as this should have presented itself before him. Such a sight is well fitted to bring before our minds the same great scene. For there is

such an eternal scene behind the changing forms of the present life; a scene not future but present, though the perfect realising of it be, to most of us, future; a world within this world, or behind it, of which we only catch glimpses sometimes through the occurrences of this life—a world such as the prophet saw, God the King on His throne, surrounded by beings all alive to His glory, serving Him continually in the greatness of their might. There is such a world within this world, and over this world, of which this world is but the veil and covering; and we only begin to understand this world, and see any order and meaning in it, when this other, which is the inner side of it, is revealed to our sight.

From the sight of the dead king and the stifling stillness of the chamber below, where no acclaims now rang in greeting of the king, the prophet lifted up his eyes, and beheld the King who dieth not, and the voice of whose praise is never still: "I saw the Sovereign seated on a throne, high and lifted up; about Him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts . . . and the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried." This is the world that exists within the world—the real world behind this one which is seen. There is a Sovereign, a majestic Sovereign, high and lifted up, of whose glory the whole earth is full. Around Him there are beings who know what He is, and who render Him

the homage due unto His name; beings full of power, and beings with activity, covering their faces with their wings lest the too great splendour of the divine face should fall on theirs and blind them; covering their feet too, conscious, though perfect beings, of their imperfection in comparison with Him, and out of shame concealing that in them which, to His eye, might seem uncomely; ever in flight also, swift to do His commandments, though conscious of their weakness, and awed before His exceeding majesty, yet not so abashed but that they can serve Him with a ready will; giving unceasing expression to that sense of what Jehovah is which fills their hearts, in the cry with which, in unbroken voice, they respond to one another: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." And in sympathy with this voice of praise the walls of the heavenly temple and the door-posts shake, and the house fills with smoke.

That cry of "Holy" does not ascribe any attribute to God. It is something far larger than the quality of moral purity, for it is added, "the whole earth is full of His glory." The word "Holy" is the highest name for God. It describes His transcendent majesty, His absolute Godhead. What these beings express, taking up each other's cry, is that He, who is before them on the throne, is God, in the sense than which nothing can be higher. In our language, their cry would be: "God, God, God! the whole earth is filled with His glory!" It is not any quality in Him that they realised, and that we need to realise. What they felt was that

they were near the majestic, unutterable Person Himself. This is the world, with its life, that lies behind and within this outer world, if we had but eyes to look through the rude matter and the rank confusions of this world, and behold it. But to most of us the veil of this world is impenetrable.

II. The second step in this history is contained in vv. 5–7: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips. . . . Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand . . . and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

The sight of God has always a re-acting influence on one's self. We always carry with us a sense of relation to God; and when we think of Him, we always also think of ourselves. We cannot think of Him out of relation to ourselves. It is part of our thought of Him, that it always includes ourselves; for He is the Sovereign, high and lifted up. This thought of Him is often fleeting, and has little influence upon our mind, oftentimes no effect to influence our life permanently. Our sight of Him is often partial, and re-acts but feebly back upon ourselves. But a real sight of Him, a full, sustained view of Him, such as this prophet had, will not be without a powerful effect upon our feeling regarding ourselves. The first thought it will occasion will perhaps be the one it occasioned to this prophet—fear. There will be such a sense of contrast between

Him and us—Him the King and us—that it will beget terror. This was the common feeling in the Hebrew mind. The distance between Jehovah and the creature was so vast, the unworthiness of the creature was so great, that when suddenly brought into the presence of Jehovah, the creature felt he must be consumed and die. "No man can see God and live."

I do not wish to raise the question whether this is the way in which we need think of God still, or must think of Him. Many things have happened since this prophet lived. The world has seen strange sights since then, sights revealing God more fully than He had been revealed to Isaiah. The love of God has been strongly commended to us since then. We are apt to be carried away by great examples, and to forget that the age of the world and circumstances differ. We are apt to impose the history of other minds upon our own, and think that we must go through the same experience as they went through, especially if such an experience be set down in Scripture. But all that we should infer from seeing an experience in Scripture is that it is a true experience, or, at the most, not uncommon; by no means, that it is universal. It was a natural and true experience for the particular man, in his age and place in the history of redemption.

It is not unnatural certainly that our thought of God should be like that of this prophet, alarming; and that, in the presence of His glory and purity, there should rush into our minds the feeling of our own uncleanness.

"Woe is me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips." The prophet was not unclean in his lips merely, he was all unclean; but he thought of his lips, from hearing the praises of the seraphim in which he was unfit to join. There his uncleanness came practically out, and home to him; but it was one affecting every part of him. It was this that alarmed him, when brought face to face with Jehovah; he felt his sins set in the light of His face. I do not know whether it be this feeling in our conscience that lies at the bottom of our fear, especially of anything connected with the other world. The disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the sea, thought it was a spirit, and cried out for fear. That was a superstition. But what is it that lies at the root of our superstitions? Is it this evil conscience, this sense of something wrong with us, which, while we are in health and safety, is dormant, but rises to a head and becomes an acute terror, when we are brought near to God or the other world?

But what is most important to observe is, that this feeling of fear was succeeded by another. Though the first, it was not the last condition of the prophet's mind. In a brief space his mind ran through a history; and thought succeeded thought of his relation to God. In the vision a seraph flew to him with a live coal from the altar, and touched his lips, saying, "Thy sin is purged." Now these two things, his fear and this that succeeded, must be taken together. They are both required, in order to

bring out the proper view of the effect on man of a full sight of God. First, fear; and then, the stilling of the fear. First, the sense of sin; and then, following it, the sense of sin purged away. "Though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me." If the sight of God stop with producing the first feeling merely, it will not have been a true, full sight of God. It will have been partial, imperfect. When God is revealed to the mind, it may be all perturbed, it may rock to and fro, and feeling after feeling pass over it. The prevailing tone may for a time be terror; but if the sight of God be full — as He is in Christ, as He is in Himself—the conclusion at the last will be peace.

This is the design of the vision of God given to men: "that they might know Thee, whom to know is eternal life"—that they may acquaint themselves with Him and be at peace. That which purged away the sin from the prophet was a coal off God's altar, brought by a ministering hand from that crowd of servants, already having a place in the circle around Jehovah. A divine fire burned up the foulness that lay on his lips. What the prophet felt on seeing the King was, that though he was on earth, he was not without, but far within, the sweep of the consuming fire of the King's anger and rule. This bringing of a coal, and laying it on his lips, made him feel that he was equally within the sweep of the purifying grace from on high. All that this prophet was able yet to perceive was, that forgiveness, redemption,

came from God. We know more; to us has been revealed *how* it comes.

III. The third step in this history is expressed in the words: "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And He said, Go, and tell this people."

Recall the two former scenes—the vision of God revealing to the prophet the world within the world; the real world behind this one that is seen, and all the life and activity and service going on there; then the other scene, his own cleansing. That second scene lifted him up out of this world, and made him belong to the other. He was himself as one of the seraphim, fit to serve, and understanding what service was. In sympathy he was lifted up into the region of that moral world which had suddenly been revealed to him. And on this there follows immediately the irresistible impulse to enter it. This came as if he had heard Jehovah saying that He had need of some one; and he himself answered that he was the person who would supply the need.

It is only the sight of God—such a sight of Him as this prophet had—that enables us to take our place in the world, and see our mission and what it becomes us to do. It is not, of course, any mere abstract view of God; it is a sight of God the Ruler, of one who holds the world together, in whom the universe, society, and human life consist. And it is a sight of Him amidst

the circumstances of our life, throwing light upon them, classifying them, bringing them into order, showing to us their meaning, and their needs and the issue of them.

This vision was given to the prophet in the year that king Uzziah died. Uzziah was a strong king, he held the reins tight. The resources of the nation had been enlarged by him, and the forces of revolution kept under. His death is the turning-point in the history of Judah. From aforetime up till now Judah had risen in prosperity; from now downwards it began to decline. The forces of disruption and dissolution were working long ere this—too much wealth, too great ease, luxury, sensuality, and indifference; but the firm hand of the king had held the State together.

The great characteristic of the age was religious indifference. That which the prophet had been enabled to see—that great divine world within this outer world—was the very thing which the nation could not be made to perceive. Men could not be impressed with the idea of a living God, a Sovereign high and lifted up, ruling over the world and life and men's consciences. They were insensible to this, and would have none of it. "The heart of the people was fat, and their ears heavy, and their eyes closed." They were incapable of being touched with the feeling of the reality of God. And this insensibility led to disobedience, to formalism, to distrust of Jehovah, and to schemes of worldly policy; and, when danger threatened, to the calling in of foreign

help: "they stayed themselves on Egypt, they trusted in Assyria"; and when these great world-powers once planted their foot on the little country, the end of it was not far distant—as described in the closing verses of the chapter.

Perhaps the death of Uzziah suggested some of this to the prophet, and made him think of it, and follow it out in his mind to its conclusion. But it was the sight of Jehovah that made him understand it on its deeper side. It was the revelation to him of a great Ruler behind all things, and a hidden glory—the real power within all things—a fire in contact with the sin and impurity of mankind, that must consume them, or cleanse it. It was this that made him feel the real meaning of the circumstances of his time, in their relation to this Ruler; and made him, when he himself had been brought into right relation to Him, take a stand in regard to the world, and assume his right place in it.

It is singular how little place we take in the world, how little we feel it needful to take any place; how we are like mere grains of sand, the sport of the wind, each one of us without inherent force, not taking a place, but rolled into a place by the forces about us, or by the mere dead weight of gravity—pushed into a profession by the example of our companions, or the advice of friends, or it may be because we think we should like something in it, but without taking a broad view of it, especially without taking a moral estimate of it as a

force which we might wield for higher ends, and setting it clearly before us as one of other great forces that should all combine, and realising it in its relation to the world and the state of society as a whole—how slow we are to feel that we have any responsibilities in regard to the condition of things.

Some of this may arise from good qualities in our minds. We think we have little influence. Or, though we perceive evils, we think it hardly falls to us to mend them; others have more right, as they have more power. Or sometimes we despair of mending things; the evil is gone too far. But oftenest, our indifference arises from our having no clear perception of how things are really going. We have never had a light from God's face cast upon them. We have never brought them into clear and distinct relation with God. And this is due in great measure to the fact that we have never realised God aright as the King, the Lord of all, the Beginning and the End. It is seeing Him as this, that gives meaning to the situation; and, by giving it meaning, compels us to see what is our place in it, and to take it. And it is singular then how any sense of weakness, that we may have had, disappears; and it hardly occurs to us to ask whether we shall have any influence or no. We no more feel ourselves one of a series of dead atoms, rolled and moved by the motion of the general mass. We become instinct with a power to act on all around; and despair is impossible, because Jehovah is King on His throne; and our voice, though

feeble, becomes distended with the power of God Himself.

Just as Isaiah now found his place and his mission, of course he also found at once his message. Isaiah's message is twofold: first ruin, and then redemption. Destruction first, and, through it, salvation. It is the very counterpart of what happened in the vision to himself: "Woe is me! for I am undone. Lo, this coal has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." The fire from God's altar purified away his sin; and the blood of Jerusalem shall be "purged from the midst thereof by the spirit of burning." "The cities shall be wasted without inhabitant and the houses without man . . . yet it shall be as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose stock remains, when they are cut down: so the holy seed is the stock thereof." The stock remains; and out of it springs a new and better growth.

It is very singular that, in a moment, Isaiah saw the whole outline of God's purpose. His whole life long, he has no more to say than he says in these words, and in that figure of the tree. The great thought of his life and his prophecies is this thought of God the King, who must destroy sin, but yet whose mercy endureth for ever. And this thought he throws into the history of his people; they must be cut down, and wasted, as a tree is felled to the ground—yet the tree cannot be destroyed; its stock remains, and a new growth will arise out of it. This is the one great idea of his prophecies,

an idea that filled his whole life, and the expression of which in many ways fills his prophecies; an idea that so engrossed his mind that he impressed it as a name upon his child, Shear-Jashub, "A remnant shall return"—the idea of the destruction of all down to a remnant, and the return of the remnant to the Lord, as the seed of a new nation. In a moment his whole life's activity stood up in this vision before him—his place among men, his work, his mission, his message, his conception of what God was doing and should do.

We see something like this sometimes in ourselves There is a distant resemblance to it in our intellectual life—in this, that in some moment of higher mental power than we usually possess, we sometimes fling out the outline of all that we shall ever think or do. All our after-life is but busied in filling in the picture with colour and shade, which, in one moment of our early life, we had drawn in sketch and outline. And sometimes, in after-life, when some thought occurs to us which we think fresh or new, we are surprised perhaps to find the rough cast of it in something which we did long ago. It is in our early days, when the mind is fresh and creative, that the impression made upon us by the world and life is deepest; and the response, which our mind then makes to the world, is most vigorous and emphatic. And this response is the contribution which we make to the life or thought of mankind; and we find that we make it in a moment: and that after years are usually spent in but amplifying it or applying it.

But this is not the analogy which I wished to point out, and which lies rather in another region. There comes a moment in our life when, as to this prophet, God is revealed to us—God, not as an object of speculation, but the living God, the King: He whose rule touches upon every living spirit, and whose will and spirit, like a subtle force, reaches all things; God, in the widest conception of Him, God as He is in Christ. And this revelation casts a new light upon the world; all things become new. We receive a new view of life, and are constrained to take a new place in it. And we obtain many times a far-reaching glimpse which takes in all our future; and we have thoughts of ourselves and of the world, and of God's purpose with it, to which after years add little except to amplify and expand them.

Isaiah's preaching was, first, a message of wrath; and then, one of mercy. No man could preach wrath pure and simple. Wrath is but the background, to set in brighter light the mercy. Even repentance could not be preached, unless there were forgiveness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The prophet lets us very little into his own feelings; he is too strong and reserved to be garrulous about them. We know not with what mind he set himself to his task. He felt that it was his task, and he must speak. But his preaching was a preaching of wrath, in order to bring into operation mercy and love.

It is not easy to say whether it is more difficult to

preach wrath or love. For a sinner to preach God's wrath to sinners, implies either very great earnestness, or very great insensibility. Yet to preach God's mercy is a great step for a sinner to take, who has any adequate sense of what sin is. There is a superficial preaching of the love of God, which appears rather to come of sentiment. On the other hand, there is a preaching of the wrath of God, that is equally unreal; not reposing on any profound feeling of His anger against sin, but due to coarseness of nature. Again, it is sometimes noticed that a man's preaching is the expression of a battle he is carrying on with himself; and he preaches the opposite of what he feels, because he is dissatisfied with his own feeling, and knows that he has not rightly realised that which is to be realised in the gospel. And thus some profoundly exercised men have preached peace and love, with a strenuousness and intensity which was a protest against their own condition of mind, which was destitute of peace, and without that sense of God's love which was felt to be rightly due.

Isaiah's preaching was a preaching of love with a background of wrath. It is manifest that to preach wrath, stopping short of love, is false. It is also manifest that in many cases the preaching of love, with no background of wrath, may be superficial and merely sentimental. Yet it is also manifest that the gospel is the love of God, and that it is this love which should be the staple of preaching. Only, the background of sin and wrath must be so placed as to show the reality

of God's love, and how it is a reality; what obstacles it has had to overcome, and has overcome; and how, having overcome them, it now stands out in all its divine power before the eyes of men.

Isaiah's sermon was to the effect that the axe must be laid to the root of the tree, and the tree hewn down to the very ground. All its former growths in branches and leaves, the products of the atmosphere and the nourishment of the time—the embodiment of the forms of thought, and the manifestation of the kind of life existing on the soil of Judah in his day,—all this must be shorn down to the very roots, that a new and holier growth might arise. There was an indestructible principle in the root, a holy seed, which yet possessed vitality enough to bear new fruit; and in the better future this would appear. This sermon he preached to the people, to the society of his day. And our Lord takes up his words, bringing the same charge of insensibility, and threatening the same judgment, which came at last to the very uttermost. Our Lord's words, taken from this prophet, and applied to His own time, are not an accommodation of the words. There is little accommodation in Scripture. No, there was an identity. The people were the same people. Their insensibility, begun in Isaiah's days, only culminated in the days of Christ. Their blindness to the spiritual, their formalism, their eager coveting of an outward rule and empire, were all revealed in their inability, when He came among them, to receive the true God and eternal life.

How far Isaiah's sermon may be preached to the society of our day, I do not know; whether to it too, the sense of a living God—the King, with whom all have to do—be not becoming an impossibility, its heart being fat and its ears heavy, and its eyes shut, with absolutely no sense except for what is material; and whether the only cure for this may not be an incision, a hewing down, which shall go to the root of our modern life.

At all events, the prophet's words and figure of the tree apply to every individual among us. Before the holy growth can appear, the old must be cut down clean to the root. The old branches, thrown out so luxuriantly into the atmosphere of the time, drinking in life from it, and into which our own life for so long has flowed, need to be lopped off. A blight must pass over us like the winter frost, killing down to the roots our former life, that it may awaken anew, in the spring-time of a better and a fuller life. We must die unto sin, and be crucified to the world. We must be buried into the death of Christ, and make it our own. This prophet's past was burnt up in the fire from God's altar. His past sin was made the very means of his new power. The "valley of Achor" was his door.

VIII

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

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THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH i. 4–10; xx

THESE verses in the first chapter describe Jeremiah's call to be a prophet of God, the kind of considerations employed to induce him to undertake the office, his shrinking from it at first, and his consent at last. And chap. xx. gives us some glimpses of his experiences in his office, his own feelings, and his comparison of what he had had to endure, with the promises made to him at the beginning.

I. The kind of considerations employed by God to induce Jeremiah to undertake the office of prophet, an arduous position to occupy in that evil time: "Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I consecrated thee; and I appointed thee to be a prophet."

Now, though there is something absolute in this language, though it seems to tell the prophet what destiny had been appointed him just as a fact about him, a fact which he had no more power to alter than he could his own stature, it is obvious that it is meant to

assure him, and lead him to acquiesce in the appointment. To say to the man, "Before I formed thee in the womb I appointed thee to be a prophet," has somehow a more assuring force than if it had been said, "I this day appoint thee to be a prophet." Yet it is difficult to see why it should be so; why God's act in the present should have less force to us than His act in the past. Perhaps the force in the idea of predestination lies in the corroboration which it brings to the present out of the past. It gives us the impression of a prevailing and fixed direction of the mind of God in regard to us; and when this is brought into relation to our history and life, it gives us great assurance and strength.

However it be, it is certainly the case that it is a source of comfort and power to us, to think that not now for the first time has God thought of us, or is making use of us; but that we have been in His mind for long, always indeed even from the beginning. When, for instance, we are in something like the position of this prophet, undertaking a serious responsibility, and can recall things in our history which we cannot but regard as providential, determining our course of life, and leading us on towards the place which we are going to occupy, it does strengthen our hope that God is now calling us to the place. The things we remember may be small, indeed trifles; but when we take a particular view of life, they acquire greater magnitude. Our minds were, perhaps, fixed on a certain career in life; but in order to pursue it, it was necessary that we should gain

some distinction in learning, or obtain some position, and we failed; and the failure altered our whole career: and now we are where we are, about to enter upon a calling more sacred. Providences of this kind, being internal, strike us more readily; and reflecting on them does enable us to find God in our life. Indeed, though we ordinarily overlook such things from want of thought, when we are led more seriously to consider our history, we find it full of them.

But there is another kind of providences which more easily escape us, but which perhaps more nearly correspond to what is said here, to the prophet, of his consecration before he was born. Such things might be the pious parents whom we had, and the godly home in which we were brought up. Or they might be more personal, certain early impressions which we had, a certain beauty and attractiveness which a life unto God appeared to possess. These things might not be permanent, only occasional; when we think of them now, in their fitful and passing nature, we are reminded of what is said of Samson, before he finally undertook the rôle of a deliverer of Israel, "that the Spirit of God began to move him in the camp at Dan." But at last the hour for decision came, as it came to Jeremiah. We stood, it may be, before a promising secular or literary career, and many things and many influences were in favour of our adopting it. But we felt certain reluctances, not very distinct, but they were there: our minds in a sort of instinctive way, rather than our wills

consciously, seemed putting out their hands in another direction. And this shaped our history. Things like these have some analogy to what is said to Jeremiah of his consecration before he was born; and when we reflect on them, they convey to us the same assurance that the words conveyed to him—that God has been operating in our minds and in our life for long; and that, from the beginning, all things have been working towards the call which, at the present moment, He is addressing to us.

II. Jeremiah's instinctive shrinking from the proposal made to him to be a prophet: "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak: for I am a child."

The prophet is not to be blamed for this instinctive unwillingness. It is natural for a man, when he has suddenly presented to him any great undertaking, to shrink back from it; the more natural, the more he feels its greatness. Moses also entreated that he might be relieved of the great commission laid on him to deliver Israel from Egypt. And Jonah fled, that he might not have to deliver the message of God in a great, unknown, heathen city. Perhaps Jeremiah's shrinking is neither to be greatly blamed, nor very greatly commended; though, certainly, more to be commended than blamed. It was possibly largely a matter of mental constitution. We do not perceive it at all in some other prophets, such as Isaiah. This prophet was a sort of John Knox, who never feared the face of man. He confronted Kings and

Commons alike with the same resolute composure. In all his prophecies, there is not a word about his own feelings. He was too strong to be conscious of what was going on in his own mind, or to analyse his own reflections. The truth he had to deliver absorbed him; the sense of the situation in which his country stood swept away before it all thoughts of himself.

But Jeremiah was a man of another sort. He was continually looking into his own mind. No doubt he lived long after Isaiah; and, as happens in all history of mind, advance in religious thought led to a greater subjectivity, to more introspection, analysis, criticism of himself and others. Jeremiah is the more interesting man for this reason, but Isaiah the more healthy man. The men of our own time are liker Jeremiah; the men of a former day, and, we may hope, the men of a day to come, liker Isaiah. But in some ways the preacher of to-day has a task more trying than the prophet. The prophets were statesmen in the kingdom of God. It was the destinies of the nation that they charged themselves with. Of course this involved the destinies of individuals, but only indirectly. The modern preacher has before him, no doubt, a congregation; but it is the destinies, the eternal destinies, of the individuals in it that are laid on him. He has to counsel and speak to minds—minds which may be perplexed, or despondent, or anxious; or it may be, on the other hand, thoughtless; to guide each, to speak to each, in the right way; to find the truth, the thought, the consideration that will just be

that needed by each mind to lead it to life. Anyone, thinking seriously of such a responsibility, may well exclaim, "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak."

In those ancient days the prophets had to be both politicians and religious teachers. They had to guide the internal destinies of the nation, as well as instruct the people in the knowledge of God. But they always did the first by doing the second. They were only indirectly politicians; by teaching men the will of God, and the meaning of His operations in the nation's history, they instructed the nation what course to pursue. Preachers nowadays have the same double task. By teaching men the truth, they trust to be able to show them how to act in social and political questions also; because these things make up men's lives, they have to act in them.

The words in which Jeremiah expressed his feeling, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child," cover two thoughts which at once occurred to the prophet, when the proposal was made to him—the thought of the men to whom he would have to speak, and the thought of what he could say to them. He felt himself a child; and he would have to go to men aged and experienced, men versed in the things of life, high in rank and armed with power, men whom he would have to oppose: and he shrank from this. Then, being also but youthful, he felt he was ignorant, unversed in the things of God, inexperienced, unable to gauge complicated situations and see through delicate affairs,

so as to be able to advise or warn, with a clear issue before his own mind.

To these two objections the reply of God is: "To all to whom I send thee thou shalt go; fear not, for I am with thee to deliver thee; and see, I put My words in thy mouth." And summing up all, God tells him he is armed with His word of power: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant." The prophet's mission was to be chiefly destructive; though he was also to construct—to build and to plant. He was sent into a vineyard to labour; but into a vineyard which was overgrown with weeds that had to be pulled up, before the true vine could find room. He was born into a world where many strongholds had to be pulled down, before the reign of peace could be proclaimed. In his day, even the holiest things had become mouldy and moss-grown, and eaten away. He lived in an age of reforms; but he took little interest in them. They were superficial, and he cherished no illusions in regard to them. They were mere scratching of the surface of the field. Men must plough deeper. He was for an overturn that went to the bottom, through the subsoil down to the eternal rock. "Break up the fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise the foreskins of your heart."

For the first time in Prophecy, the heart comes into prominence. It is the heart that is good or ill. "Cast your idols of gold and your idols of silver to the moles

and to the bats," cried Isaiah. "Cast your ark of the covenant, your temple made with hands, your holy sacrifices, your sacred utensils and machinery—cast them all into the same dust-hole," cried Jeremiah. "In those days, saith the Lord, men shall no more say, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. I will make a new covenant with them, saith the Lord, I will write My law upon their hearts." Jeremiah is the prophet, not of reform, but of revolution; the preacher of a new régime —but the new régime is the New Covenant. It may be made a question whether the preacher should mainly assail sins, or commend righteousness. Both may be necessary; but, upon the whole, positive teaching is always more powerful than negative. To counsel, to persuade to righteousness, will be more fruitful than assailing vices. It is the love of Christ that constrains us not to live unto ourselves.

The words spoken by the Lord express the ideal of the kind of office to which Jeremiah was called, whether in his time or in our own. The Old Testament is a book of ideals. The ideal of the prophet's office, both then and now, is that he should feel himself such to every one to whom he has to go; and that he should feel that the words he speaks are put by God into his mouth. This ideal is hard to realise. The course of history has been so prolonged, we are so far away now from the time when God spake immediately to men; society has

adopted as its own, so many things that did not at all originally belong to it, and they are become things of course, expected to occur every week, and exciting no reflection, that it is not easy, either for the speaker or the hearer, to realise such an immediateness of God as that of which Scripture speaks. But in order to a fruitful ministry, both the minister and the people should have this feeling—he, that what he is to speak is from God; and they, that what they are going to hear is from God. He cannot attain this without two things—a very constant and close fellowship with God, and a very constant and wide study of His word. To be well balanced, to avoid the exaggeration not uncommon in preaching, one must have a wide knowledge of the general scope of God's word; but if anything will influence a man to make sure that he is speaking the word of God to his people, it will be the feeling that they come expecting and anxious to hear from him the word of God. We long to have more of that faith, that realisation of God, which prophets and apostles had. If we had it, it would make men of us, instead of that which we are, mere wavering shadows that come and go in the wind and the sun. The old philosopher said, "Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world with my lever." Scripture gives us a place to stand; that standing-place is God.

III. Jeremiah's experiences in life, of how God's promises to him were fulfilled.

With the two assurances that God would be with him

to deliver him from all to whom he was sent, and that His word would be put into his mouth, the prophet entered on his task. He seems to have taken the promises very literally. The second of these, that God would put His words in his mouth, he never seems to have doubted. Though almost alone in the truths he believed and taught, and in the policy he advocated, though he had to thwart every purpose, and cross every inclination of his people, he never was brought, by the doubt and disbelief of others, himself to doubt. And this is characteristic of all the prophets, and is very remarkable. To us nowadays, that which puts the severest strain upon our belief is just the disbelief of others, or of men in general. The influence upon us of the general current of the human mind is exceedingly strong. But when Paul speaks of having fought the fight and kept the faith, in terms implying that it cost an effort to keep it, among all the things which he enumerates as being against him, the hardships of his lot and the persecutions of men arising from their disbelief, the fact of this disbelief itself never seems to have made any impression upon him. Must not these men have possessed, or been given, something which we do not possess in these days, or possess only in a very small degree?

The prophet never doubted that God's word was in his mouth; but it was different with the other promise—"I will be with thee to deliver thee." He had to suffer bitter and insulting usage; he was buffeted, tortured,

flung into a dungeon to die of hunger. The men to whom he was sent seemed entirely to get the upper hand of him. It appeared to him that he was in no way delivered from them; and he was driven to say that God had not kept His word to him. His acceptance of the invitation to be a prophet had brought him into the cruellest dilemma. If he spoke the word of the Lord, he was subject to mockery and unbearable hardships; and if he resolved to have done with it, and speak that word no more, it was like a fire in his bones, and he could not forbear. And this dilemma was none of his creation; and he went back upon his reluctance to undertake the office, and blamed God for persuading him to do it: "O Lord, Thou didst induce me, and I was induced; Thou art stronger than I." There is something pathetic and childlike in this complaint about God, a strange sense of nearness to God, and a simplicity in speaking to Him, which nowadays almost provoke a smile. In another place he speaks in this way: "O Lord, let me talk with Thee concerning Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they happy, that deal very treacherously?" In the present instance he felt that God had dealt unfairly with him. He had used His superior wisdom and persuasion, to induce a weak foolish man to undertake what his own judgment declined.

But why could not the prophet renounce the service, and plead essential error in regard to the agreement?

Might he not have unfrocked himself, and gone at liberty? No; this was impossible. Once a prophet, always a prophet. Because to be a prophet was not to receive a mere external call. It was to see God, to be illumined by Him. It was an inward thing; and could no more be forgotten or got rid of, than one can forget or get rid of the experiences which are called conversion, whatever perplexities may arise afterward. Such a thing abides, like an anchor that moors the ship, however violent the tempest be. But the anchor does not avert the tempest.

Now, perhaps, many persons find themselves in the same straits as the prophet. They know they have experienced too much of God to go back, but the perplexities and difficulties about them are insurmountable. And they almost wish they had never gone, or been led, so far. Had they never known what of God they know, they would have been at peace. And there are some who save themselves these perplexities by acting just as Jeremiah did not act. They are conscious like him of an impulse from God; and, like him, they foresee the difficulties, difficulties not of persecution, as in his case, but difficulties of thought, of science, or of philosophy. The problem is set before them, as it was set before him; but, unlike him, they refuse to work it out. They seek escape from it. They choose some walk in life which evades the difficulty, and relieves them of the necessity, in the meantime at least, of solving the question. They are

shrewder than the prophet; but, after all, are they wiser than he? Do they expect to escape the problem by deferring it? Or if they escape it, may this not be, after all, a thing far more serious and disastrous than facing it with whatever consequences?

Jeremiah solved the question, or allowed it to be solved for him: "O Lord, Thou didst induce me, and I was induced." It may be doubted if the great problem can really be evaded. It has a vitality like life itself. It cannot be disposed of for good, by shoving it aside in the meantime. It will come back. It is well to settle it in youth, just when it presents itself, as Jeremiah did. For if left over to old age, it is more difficult. Let me tell you where the greater difficulty lies. You will be quite well able, at any time, to appreciate intellectually the tremendous issues. But you will find yourselves unable to face them, in a religious sense, with seriousness, with sincerity. You will find your minds hard, superficial, insincere, unable to be truly serious. You will be so conscious of a want of true seriousness, that you will yourself mock at your own prayers. And you will be reduced to praying for only one thing, namely, sincerity in your prayers; and you will be conscious that you are not sincere, even when you pray for sincerity.

Now, in conclusion: the question which the prophet raised, whether God's promise had been kept to him, is not without interest. Certainly it was not kept in the way the prophet, with the sanguine expectations of

youth, looked for. He possibly thought that having the word of God in his mouth would act like a charm; and that men and things that opposed, would go down before him, as by magic. He lived to learn that this was not the way with human life, or the word of God. In two ways the promise might appear not kept. First, certainly for a great part of the prophet's life, his opponents had physically the better of him, and subjected him to the cruellest usage. And, secondly, he undoubtedly suffered defeat in his own mind, he felt put to the worst; or, what is the same, he did not feel that the Lord was with him, to deliver him. But as to the first, now that we can look back over his life as a whole, it certainly was full of remarkable deliverances. When he was in danger of his life from the king, he escaped, through the interposition of the princes, the fate that befell his fellow-prophet Urijah. When flung into a dungeon, the interest of a negro slave in his sufferings induced the king to rescue him. And when the great catastrophe came and the city fell, while the nobles were slain and the king led captive, the prophet was set at liberty. Taking his history over all, he did experience deliverance: though cast down, he was not destroyed.

And in regard to his own mind, and the sense of defeat which he had and of not being delivered, it is possible that he put more into the assurance given him than it contained. The promise bore upon the fact that God would be with him, not upon the feeling in his own

mind that God was with him. The distinction needs to be drawn. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," so runs the assurance. It does not run, "I will make thee feel that I am with thee." This may be, but it also may not be. And it is no doubt the want of this feeling, or, at any rate, the fluctuating nature of it, in the different experiences of our life, which allows things to exercise their due effects upon us, and be to us the discipline that they are. The possession of such a feeling, in every trial, would rob things of their natural qualities. It might be a very elevated life; but it would want some of the things needful for us here. It is not in the moment of passing through the waters, that men have the feeling or assurance that God is with them; it is when they have passed through, without being overwhelmed, that the conviction becomes strong that He was so. It is not in the thick of the fight, but after the victory, that the soldiers raise their Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Along with the three children there was one in the furnace like a son of God. It is not certain that *they* saw Him, though others did.

Jeremiah was induced, and he let himself be induced, to be the servant of God. It would not be true perhaps to say that he regretted it. But he was disappointed and disillusioned. God's power had not been exerted in his behalf in the way he had looked for. He was not victorious among men, but defeated. Instead of being armed with God's power, he seemed left in all

his own human weakness. Yet this defeat was just his victory. It drove him into God's presence, as we may say, and gave him God. Feeling he had nothing else —none else in the world—God became all to him. His life grew to be a fellowship with God; his thoughts seemed a dialogue between himself and God. If God seemed to deny him all other things, He gave him Himself; and at moments he was conscious of what this was, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Our new man is something like the new moon. You observe a crescent, bright and luminous with a light falling on it from the source of light itself; but, though dark and less perceptible, you can still see the old moon in her arms.

Thus there was another side to the prophet's feelings. If he had sorrows, he had also joys. The service of God was not a monotony. The secrets of human life from side to side, and of what the world is and contains, were opened to him.

It is only the godly mind, that is awake to what life is—life in this world in all its breadth. Other minds sleep or doze. "Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord; for He hath delivered the soul of the poor. Cursed be the day wherein I was born. Cursed be the man that brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee." Such feelings, though put together in successive verses, cannot have been contemporaneous.

No, but they were part of the same life—the life of a servant of God. Our Lord Himself, He who took human life upon Him in all its meaning, was tossed between the same two poles. Of Him it is said: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit"; but He Himself also said: "Now is My soul exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." One moment He was enveloped in a light brighter than created sun ever shed; and, at another, wrapped in a darkness deeper than the thickest midnight that ever fell upon the earth. And may not His followers, or some of them at least, expect the same experience? "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. *It is enough* for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord."

IX

JOHN THE BAPTIST

IX

JOHN THE BAPTIST

MATTHEW xi. 2–19; LUKE i. 5–25, 57–66, iii. 1–20; JOHN i. 19–37

THE history of John, as given in the above passages, would afford material for a number of discourses. But it is most interesting, and perhaps most instructive, to look at any life from beginning to end, noting only the chief incidents in it, and passing over the details. For the details of most lives are very much the same; and we gain the best idea of any life by looking at the prominent features of it, and the most striking scenes in it, since it is from these that we obtain a true idea of the meaning of the life as a whole. The words of our Lord regarding John are very remarkable: "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." We may not be quite able to understand this extraordinary eulogy, or to show how it is justified; but perhaps we may get a glimpse of some of the elements of greatness in John, and may learn from them to form a wiser and more just opinion of what true greatness is.

I. The Christening of John.

The first scene in the life of this child which is presented to us is his Circumcision, or, as we should now say, his Christening, when he was given a name, and was received into the number of the people of God. It is a ceremony which no one can look upon without interest, though our interest perhaps is oftener curiosity than thoughtfulness. It is but seldom that, when we see the infant presented, we forecast the years, and wonder in our minds what destiny this young life will have—what life he will live, and what death he will die. And yet, after all, this is just what makes life important—the fact that it is weighted with a destiny, charged with an issue. There were many things connected with this child John, which forced his future destiny upon the attention. His parents were not now young. Even his mother was advanced in years. They had hoped for a child; but the hope had been deferred, and at last abandoned. Suddenly, as the godly priest was praying in the temple, a vision appeared to him; and he was promised a son. The destiny also of the child was so far sketched to him, "He shall be great; and many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God."

These supernatural occurrences, connected with the birth of John, indicated that he was to take a high place among men, and play in his day a great part. It is remarkable how often, in Scripture, such miracles and interventions of God in the histories of families

are connected with the birth of children; the birth of Isaac, for example, to Abraham and Sarah; the birth of Samuel to Elkanah and Hannah; and others. Of course, miraculous events were connected with the birth of these children; but, as we read the stories, I think we shall come to the conclusion that the important thing was not the miracles, but what the miracles suggested. It was of little consequence that Zacharias saw a vision, or that he was told beforehand that he should have a son, and what the child's future should be. The important thing was this, which remains when all the miracles are removed, namely, that God is present in the history of families among men, and that His care extends to them; that it is He that brings every fresh life into the world, and He that appoints its future for it. Miracles seem to us often just to have this meaning, to set before us in a striking way things we are apt to overlook; to body out to our eyes great truths which we might not otherwise detect; to make the great hidden principles and forces that rule human life visible to us—in a word, to impress on us that, whatever may be the form of the outside of our life, the inside of it is God. There is not a life that comes into the world, even in the most sordid hovel, not an infant held up to receive the water of baptism, however humble and obscure, but, if I can say so, God is round about it and its parents. The divine environs them; God is appointing it its place, dictating its name, drawing beforehand the lines of its history.

The fact that God Himself gave the name to this child shows that it was His child. The name, John, means "The gift of God." It was His child; but He had *given* it. There is not a child that enters upon life but might bear this name; and not one to whom God does not give the name, and whom He does not regard as His own.

It was an interesting company that gathered together to perform and witness the sacred rites connected with this infant—a devout and godly company. We are apt, when we read the Gospels, to fancy that at this period there was virtually no living religion in Israel, that it was only when Christ came that life began again to throb in the dead body. But it would be a mistake to suppose this. The Gospels, so far as they give us any history apart from that of Christ, are occupied with the ruling parties in the State, with Sadducees and Pharisees and scribes. The Sadducees derived their name probably from Sadok, the man whom Solomon called to be high priest in the room of Abiathar. They were an ancient family; and circumstances through which the State had passed had thrown the government into their hands. They were the statesmen of the day; and we know that statesmen are chiefly occupied with the external interests of the country, with its prestige and place among the nations. However honourable and patriotic, they are not usually very religious; and, being occupied more with the external destinies of the State, they

sometimes overlook, or fail to gauge, what is deepest in the domestic life of the people.

The Pharisees and the scribes, again, were the clergy of the time. They called themselves Pharisees, that is, Separatists or Dissenters, as we might say; and no doubt the name had once had a genuine meaning. It was an old name too, and went back to the time when those who assumed it felt it necessary to separate themselves from the lower generation around them, to lead a life more simple and devout and more directly ruled by the word of God. Hence the Pharisees and scribes devoted themselves to the interpretation and exposition of Scripture, and to deducing rules from it, which should regulate every action of human life. It was inevitable, perhaps, that they should lay more stress upon men's mere external actions, and upon petty religious formalities, than on the true spirit of religion. And it was equally inevitable that they should pride themselves upon their past history and religious strictness, and become mere self-righteous formalists.

It is not among these classes that the true religious life of Israel is to be looked for at this time, but among the common people, who are neither statesmen nor ecclesiastics, in families like those to which Zacharias and Elisabeth belonged, and out of which Mary, the mother of the Lord, came. In these circles the idea of greatness was different from that of the statesmen—"he shall be great; and many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God."

And their idea of power was, being filled with the Holy Ghost. It was spiritual power, the power whose touch quickens the dead, and imparts spiritual and religious life. Not only were these circles devout, but there was a strange elevation in their religion. The hymns of Zacharias and Mary rise high above mere human compositions. There is a consciousness in them of the nearness of God, an expectancy, a feeling that they stand on the eve of some great manifestation from heaven. What inspires them is the preliminary breathings of that divine Spirit who was immediately to be revealed in Christ.

II. John the Prophet and Popular Preacher.

It was out of this home of religious sincerity, and religious exaltation and expectancy, that John came. And he imbibed its spirit: he became the embodiment of it. For thirty years we hear nothing of him, except that he was in the wilderness until his showing unto Israel. Like Christ afterwards, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. The enthusiasm that filled him, the thoughts that crowded into his mind, the problems over which he brooded, the expectancy that bore him up,—these overmastered him, and drove him away from men. In the wilderness he was alone with God. There he learned what God is; and to know what God is, is also to know what man is. Away from the crowds in the cities he learned, if not the varieties of human life, yet the essentials of it, the fundamental and elemental features of it. He reduced living to a minimum. He

was clothed with a garment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey. But when all the accessories of life, as we usually live it, were removed, the man remained —remained all the greater. The spirit of the man looked out from the shaggy covering and the emaciated features, more powerful than ever.

Thus, with his principles fixed by long meditation, John came forth among men (as our Lord said), not a reed shaken with the wind, swayed this way or that by the opinions of others, but firm, even if he should be solitary, in his own opinions; not clothed in soft raiment, but a protest against the luxuriousness that ever threatens to smother our life, and a proclamation that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth—one who, both by his appearance and his words, drew men away from conventionalities to what was real and abiding in human life.

When John appeared as a preacher, he did not need to beat up a congregation. There went out to him all Judea, scribes and Pharisees, publicans and sinners, soldiers and civilians. Men were conscious that a new power had appeared among them. Something, perhaps, was due to his appearance; the soft livers in the cities wondered at the unkempt, shaggy figure, whose trumpet tones shook them. His emaciated, weather-beaten face, from which there gleamed an eye all the darker and more piercing for the pallor and thinness of the features

surrounding it, suggested to them that this man had gone into deeper experiences, and knew currents of feeling quicker and more profound than any they had ever been conscious of.

Some went because others went, and praised because others praised; for fashion is infectious, and John had become the fashion, the rage. But, in such cases, this may always be said that the preacher who draws the universal multitude, the learned and the unlearned, the fashionable classes as well as the simple unpretentious masses, will always have some genuine element of power in him, some touch of nature that makes him kin to all. He will be able to strike some true common chord in the human heart, and make it thrill, and draw music from it. John awakened in men a real concern. He threw every class that came to him back upon itself, and upon its past life, and made them see that they had lived amiss. He said to all, "Repent!" and to all, "Reform! bring forth fruits meet for repentance." He made all feel—scribes, publicans, and soldiers alike—that they had been untrue to the place they held. He brought them all to confession, and to ask the question, "What shall we do?" He awoke, for the time at least, genuine religious anxiety. His words were like a yeast thrown into the life of his time; and it raised a wide religious ferment.

This is evident from the example of Herod. Herod was one of the worst men of his time—cruel, an intriguer, frivolous, and immoral—a man whom even the world of

that day could not long tolerate, and who, along with that Herodias who was his evil genius, came to a wretched end. Yet even this man heard John gladly, and did many things because of him. Even Herod was not all bad. Deep down, under all the hard crust of evil that had overlaid his life, there was something that could yet be touched. His eye could be made to see fair visions of a life unlike his own, visions which he would long to clutch and keep. He was able to wish his past undone. Moods of tenderness, for long unwonted, returned. There were moments when he felt broken. He longed to escape the entanglements which bad men and worse women had woven around him. Such moods were perhaps temporary; he forgot them, and became again what he had been before. Such moods we all have at times, and we often wonder what their meaning may be; what worth they have in God's sight, what possibilities may be in them for ourselves.

But the moods were genuine, all the same. The good in Herod was not wholly extinct. Neither is it wholly extinct in any man. Even in the arid desert, where there seems nothing but shifting, barren sand, if you sink a shaft deep enough, wells of purest water will bubble up; and even in the most hardened nature there are wells of feeling, which may be reached and made to flow. May we not therefore assume, when we consider this, that John's work was neither vain nor a mere evanescent excitement? That which had been promised

regarding him was fulfilled—"Many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God."

But how did John himself pass through all this applause, and popularity, and success? Was he intoxicated by it? or seduced from his principles by it? or bewildered by it, so as to think himself something that he was not, and to assume a place which did not belong to him? States have patronised the Church; and, too often, the Church has become the tool of the State, and the supporter of its unequal and class policy. Princes have courted preachers; and, too often, preachers have been seduced by the flattery, and have condoned the crimes and immoralities of princes. The attentions of king Herod did not turn John's head. There was a King above Herod; and the law of this King had been transgressed by him. What lay on John was the sense of this supreme King, and of a law that was the law of the universe, to which kings and subjects alike are amenable.

John had come back from the desert, in which there are no kings, only the great heaven above—God and His Law. And with this law he confronted Herod, saying with no circumlocution, and no apology for his plain speaking: "It is not lawful for thee to have her." The danger to John did not lie in the applause of men: he was no reed shaken with the wind; and it did not move him. The danger was a more subtle one. It came not from the estimation of men, but from the great gifts God had bestowed on him. These gifts

might temporarily bewilder him. Might he not have misunderstood himself? Might he not be more than he thought himself to be, at starting? Men were everywhere asking whether he were not the Messiah. Might not God mean more for him than he had himself dreamed of? The currents seemed bearing him on their bosom towards some higher destiny than he had thought of.

Thoughts like these may have arisen in John's bosom; and, if they did, they were seconded by the thoughts of men around him. Yet, if they occurred to him, it was but for a moment. If he was shaken, if he oscillated or trembled, if he failed for a moment to understand himself, he immediately returned again to assurance and rest. When priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who art thou? he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? what sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make even the way of the Lord." John regarded himself as, in a manner, no one. He was a Voice—a herald of the approach of another. When the snows of winter are over and gone, and the soft winds begin to blow, we hear the strange weird note of the bird of spring, like something falling on us from the blue sky. We hear only the note: the bird is invisible in the heavens; but the note thrills us. We know that spring is nigh. The Voice has travelled to us from realms where spring always dwells; and we

know that it is speeding towards us on wings as swift as those of its messenger. And thus John thought of himself. He was a voice, something almost impersonal, saying to men, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." "They asked him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ?" He answered, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

John himself was but a herald voice; and his work was but a symbol. He but drew diagrams, to suggest the realities that were coming. Water will wash the body, but it will not purify the spirit. The spirit is like a precious metal, from which water will run off, leaving all its impurities and dross still there. The spirit must be baptized with fire, suffused with heat, penetrated, even melted, with the fire of God, that it may be cleansed; and He who would thus set aglow the spirit of man was at hand. Thus John, in the midst of his popularity, remained unaffected. He passed through all its temptations unchanged. But it began to appear that his day was over. People wearied of him. The fashion changed. The thunder and the earthquake had lost their terrors. Men revenged themselves upon him for the terrors he had caused them, and because he brought them to their knees, by ridiculing him and his manner. They had recovered from the fright he gave them; and they vented their dislike in mockery. John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said he had

a devil. "The man," they said, "is touched in the head, and why mind him?" They forsook him. Another voice had begun to be heard, a still small voice; and some found it had a greater charm than the thunder of John's, and they flocked to listen to its gentle tones.

It was a trying hour for John; and there were some who rubbed the salt into the wound. Whether they were sympathisers, or candid friends, or busybodies pleased to make mischief, is hard to say. "Rabbi," said they, "He to whom thou didst bear witness beyond Jordan, baptizeth; and all men come to Him." Professional jealousy is said to breed the deadliest rancour known; when one hears praise bestowed on another of the same cloth, it is said to run through the veins like poison. John heard the words that told him that his sun was setting, and that a brighter star had risen on the horizon; and he answered, not with chagrin, but with joy: "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. He must increase, but I must decrease." Surely nothing greater or nobler was ever said. A man has nothing except it be given him of God. What I have, God has given me. What my professional brother has, God has given him. If he can alleviate human pain and distress with more skill than I, it is from God he has the gift; if he can speak to men's consciences with greater power than I, it is of God. A spark of goodness or power from God animates us all. It is God in us. Let us see God in each other, and rejoice.

III. John the Prisoner and Martyr.

John was thrown into prison, because he assailed the private life of Herod, saying that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. It has been suggested that Herod put John in prison that he might be out of the way, and to save him from the plots against his life which the women of the court, less self-restrained than he was, were weaving against him. If this was his purpose, he was not successful. If he refused to give way to their desires in one way, he fell into the trap which they set for him in another. The story need not be repeated. The daughter of Herodias danced before Herod and those at meat with him; and he promised her whatever she should ask. And, being instructed of her mother, she asked the head of John the Baptist in a basin.

We are surprised when we consider what are the forces that have the upper hand in this world, and how the greatest moral forces, and even truth itself, seem at the mercy of depraved women and debauched men. We mistake, no doubt. These people could kill John; but they could not kill the truth he represented. I remember a remark made by an English newspaper during the Indian Mutiny. The soldiers who mutinied were blown to pieces from the mouth of guns. The remark made was: "You may blow men, but you cannot blow ideas, to pieces from the mouth of a cannon." And it is ideas that rule the world. The truth represented by John, perhaps, gained by his death. It is

only when men die, that the power which they possessed is felt by other men. While they lived, there was a kind of personality about them, that imprisoned and hampered the pure spirit of truth which they represented. Only when they themselves are removed, is the truth set free—the pure, true humanity or true godliness—and it breathes out and is felt in its universality and beauty by mankind.

We might think John's death premature; he was only thirty, when the messengers of death entered his cell. But perhaps no man's death is premature, at least so far as his fame and influence is concerned. For the very earliness of his death gives a touch of pathos to his history, and makes his memory more fascinating and absorbing; and men think of what he might have been; and so he becomes magnified in bulk and power. And as they catch up his thoughts and suggestions, and labour to develop them themselves, their rude efforts drive them back always to the man who is gone; and they fancy what his matured conceptions would have been: and a brighter halo encircles his memory.

Wherein, then, lay the greatness of John? and what was the work he did? His greatness lay largely perhaps in his genuineness, in the grasp of reality which he had of human life. He saw it in its simplicity and its reality. He laid an emphasis on sin and duty. He was a man who looked behind conventionalities, and stripped off coverings, and showed men as they

are. But if this had been all, he would not have been the greatest of those born of women. The painter who paints reality merely, however graphic and powerful his delineation be, only fulfils half his task. He must also teach us by showing us what should be, what might be. Nay, we look that he should be in some sense prophetic, and encourage us with visions of what will be in a better future. It is not the real, but the ideal, in Art and in all things, in which power to make us better resides.

And John did not merely show what men are, or what they should be; he had visions of what they were to be, of what God was about to make them. He had presentiments of a divine day, and that it was about to dawn. He did not tell men their duty merely, and leave them with the impossible task of fulfilling it. He knew that power to fulfil it came from on high; and he was gifted to perceive that the power was at hand, and about to be revealed. He did not show men earthly things only, but heavenly things. He did not say "Repent," but "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "I baptize with water; there standeth one among you who will baptize with the Holy Ghost and with power. Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world," he said, pointing to Christ.

It is this that makes men great, whatever they be, whether inventors or statesmen — the vision of the future,—of possibilities which men cannot yet realise. And especially here lies the greatness of the preacher

—in his sensibility to the nearness of something not yet manifest—to a revelation of Christ which is at hand—that, in all he is doing, he feels himself on the marge, on the outskirts, of a great manifestation of Christ, when He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost, and take away the sin of the world. And this is his message still to us. God has come nigh. The Redeemer is here. Receive Him. The kingdom of God is among you; the door is open. Enter in, that you may see the light.

X

NICODEMUS

X

NICODEMUS

JOHN iii. 1–8 and xix. 38, 39

THE words "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" were spoken to a man inquiring concerning this kingdom; and they are important in many ways. For they express the conditions on which one may see this kingdom: "*Except* a man be born again"; they also express these conditions with strong asseverations of their truth: "*Verily, verily*, I say unto you, Except a man be born again"; and then these conditions of seeing the kingdom of God are expressed by the King Himself, who best knows them: "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you."

The kingdom of God is that sphere where God exercises His sway—that class of men over whom God rules—not as He does over all things by His power, whether they will or no, but in whose hearts He reigns, and who obey, love, and serve Him in all submissiveness and faithfulness. And to see this kingdom is, first of all, to become aware that there is such a thing; that there are men in whose hearts God's will prevails, to

the exclusion of their own wills; who are truly subject to Him, who serve Him with all that they own, and are ready to do for Him all that a free and faithful and intelligent will can perform. To see the kingdom of God is this; but it is more: it is to reach it, to attain unto it, to be also of it. And the condition of seeing it, according to the strong asseveration of the King Himself, is: "That a man be born again." It involves certainly a great change, for a man of the ordinary class of men, such as we all are, with whom God is not in all their thoughts, to come to realise that God may take possession of his whole mind; and a greater change still, for such men to have Him actually in such possession of them. Christ might well call such a change—"being born again."

I will not seek to draw attention to more than a few of the outstanding expressions made use of in the interview.

I. The first approaches of a human soul to Christ.

This is what we see in Nicodemus' introductory words: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." Nicodemus had not true and full views regarding Christ; but there was something in Christ, that touched and attracted him. No doubt, Christ was making in the world then, as He has always done, much noise and ferment. He had not been long before the world, but He had already begun to produce a certain impression. Men's minds, startled

at first, hesitating for a time, were now generally inclining to one conclusion. The current, in spite of many obstacles, was setting in favourably to Him. Men who thought were prepared, not certainly unanimously, but generally, to go so far, to concede to Him a good deal, and admit that He was a teacher come from God. There were some who went further, and recognised in Him the Messiah, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. And there were some who refused Him all recognition. But among men of moderate views, who were not partisans, or violently one-sided in their sentiments, this was the opinion that had come to prevail: "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God."

And perhaps this confession expresses not amiss the feeling both of the world and of the Church toward Christ still. He is a teacher come from God. Those who profess to believe in Him have scarcely got further; for at what problem are all earnest minds so hard at work, as at this problem of Christ? And what is called the world no longer cares to dispute the truth of these words in one sense or another. He is a teacher come from God. There is a feeling now among men, the majority of men, that Christ is the Highest Being the world can ever see; and that His teaching is from God, in some higher sense than that of any other. This is the feeling even among men whom we do not call believing.

The philosophers do not look for any one again so

pure and lofty as Christ. He was the Son of the Highest, standing to Him in the closest relation of likeness and of love, altogether godly, loving God with His whole heart, and doing His whole will, walking with Him in all His ways, as a son with his father. He was a teacher come from God, speaking such truths about God, and teaching by His own example such a life with God as none ever imagined before, or can think to emulate after. This is the position the thought of the age has assumed; its foremost men no longer deny the greatness and the power of Christ. They hold Him to be without a peer in God's universe. He is the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

This testimony is sometimes borne more in secret than before the world, like that of Nicodemus: "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God." I do not stop to speculate whether there may not be some genuine faith under this apparently rather negative confession; or whether this position, which men of thought are now taking up with regard to Christ, be really a gain or a loss to religion. On the one hand, it may seem a gain that they concede so much, even though their concessions do not amount to faith in Him. On the other hand, half a truth is sometimes more dangerous than a whole lie. That which is plainly false will deceive no one; that which is false at heart, but glittering with a gilding of truth, may draw and seduce many.

It is certainly possible to utter this sentiment with

regard to Christ, "Thou art a teacher come from God"; and yet go no further. The thought or science that speaks thus, is apt to keep Him, like any other subject, outside of it. The chief office of science, with regard to all other things, is to define them, to put its mark of classification upon them, to catalogue them, and have done with them. And thus it deals with Christ; it calls Him a teacher come from God. All things come from God. Many are teachers, some higher, some lower. Of the teachers that come from God, He is the highest, the most perfect example that has or will come. And having thus defined Him, exhausted Him, science has no time to lose, and starts away on other and newer explorations.

This, at any rate, was not the spirit in which Nicodemus uttered the words. For, if it had been, there was no reason why he should be here at all, much less at the still hour of night. He had not exhausted Christ. Rather he felt that he had come, unexpectedly, on the shore of an ocean that was boundless. It is no doubt possible to utter this testimony without going any further, to stop short with the feeling that Christ is a singular problem in the history of man, the most singular of many problems very singular; and then, amidst the multitude of riddles in life, to regard this one as like the others—a speculative question of the mind rather than of the conscience—and to lose hold of it as a thing that must be settled, first of all, and at once.

This problem, however, took hold of Nicodemus as something different from all other things. It possessed his mind. The words, as he spoke them, illustrate the first approaches of a soul to Christ. The soul starts at first with no more knowledge, perhaps, than the world around it, of Christ. It only knows the common opinion about Him, the public talk, some words that He had spoken, or things that He had done. But this word or thing has a strange reality in it. It speaks the common language; but it speaks it with a power all its own. So the soul feels there is something about Him greater than about men. Its feelings about Him may be vague enough; but they are certain and strong. "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."

Yet again there is a timidity in approaching Christ. The soul would rather put its feelings upon other people, and give them credit for the approach it is making. "*We* know that Thou art a teacher." The feeling that He is different from men is so great that it has a certain awe of Him, and supports itself by the opinion of others also. But somehow in spite of fears, and in spite of vagueness, there is such a restlessness in its state, and such an attraction in Him, that it must go to Him. And its restlessness and excitement may rise so high, that the man must go at the first opportunity, even if unseasonable: "The same came to Jesus by night." In this respect many resemble Nicodemus. They know something of Christ,

and would be glad to know more. There is something about Him that draws them. They cannot put away from themselves the feeling that God is with Him; that His works in the world are above man's; that He is come from God, and has something to say to them about God, which no one else can say. They have a reverential feeling towards Him, although perhaps their ideas regarding Him are far from distinct; and they are fain to support themselves by a reference to general opinion: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God."

II. Christ's grave, I might almost say, peremptory answer to all these vague and general advances towards Him: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

There is something inexplicable in this answer. It seems beside the point, this reference to the kingdom of God, to which Nicodemus had made no allusion whatever. Did Christ speak to what He knew to be in Nicodemus' heart? Or did He speak out of the fulness of His own heart, when He went straight to the subject of the kingdom of God? Sometimes our words, particularly when we are going to introduce an important subject, do not betray all our meaning; and Christ may have at once addressed Himself to what, He divined, was in the ruler's heart. Or, on the other hand, He may have disregarded Nicodemus' words, hardly hearing them; and gone at once, now that He had an opportunity, and an open human mind before Him,

to that of which His own heart was full. Some have thought that the words of Nicodemus "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God," were meant by him as a slight flattery of Christ, by way of breaking the ice. If so, it is remarkable how, with a dignified silence, Christ omits all allusion to it, thus intimating that this was not the place, nor, if Nicodemus knew Him rightly, was He the person, with whom to attempt such a thing. Then, with a certain impatient contempt for formalities and conventionalisms, and for those who used them in the presence of Himself and the truths of life which He suggested, Christ brings forward at once, with an unusual peremptoriness and abruptness, the fundamental law of His kingdom: "Except a man be born again."

It was often needful for Christ to correct false impressions of His kingdom by showing the other side. Accordingly, when this amiable Pharisee came to Him and began speaking of a teacher, as if some instruction was all that men needed, He lifted up His calm face, and fixing His eyes upon him, said with an unusual gravity and seriousness: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As might have been expected, this drew forth the protest of Nicodemus: "How can a man be born when he is old?" Now Christ did not merely correct false impressions of His kingdom, by showing also the other side. There was a certain abrupt sternness and putting down of human instincts, which must have made Him the wonder of many, and even the terror of some.

Indeed, it was Christ's way, on certain occasions, to put the very worst face He could upon the gospel. He did this often. There was a vein of severity in His nature. No doubt, He always knew who it was He was dealing with, and acted as He saw best. And He acted very variously. Those who were fearful and held back, deterred by the difficulties of following Him, He drew by saying His fellowship was easy: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Those who had opportunity, but were slow to use it, He roused by urging the hardness of the task: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." But those who were forward, and who looked upon joining Him as a small matter, easy of accomplishment and involving no cost, He repelled by holding up before them the sacrifices which following Him entailed: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." Those who would climb, without more ado, into the fortress of salvation, He led round to the most perpendicular and unscalable side of the strong tower. The gate to life was not only strait, it was a needle's eye; an opening, indeed, but who could hope to pass through it? To those who were fascinated by the beauty and the peace of the face of holiness, He showed also tears, and the workings of anguish, and clouds upon the brow, and dust and ashes upon that fair head.

This sterner side usually showed itself, when Christ

had to deal with sentiment, or propriety, or superficialness; as when He disposed of one impulsive person, who cried: "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," by saying "that the foxes had holes, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head." In like manner He said to another, who proposed to postpone joining Him, till he had bidden farewell to those at home at his house: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven." And perhaps it was just the superficialness of Nicodemus, who seemed to speak as if a little instruction was all men wanted, that ruffled Christ, and made Him set before the man the law of His kingdom in its most uncompromising form: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

III. The protest of human nature against this law of the kingdom of God. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

The decisiveness of Christ was met by a reclamation equally strong on the other side. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Christ's grave enunciation of the law of His kingdom went to the bottom of the difference between Him and the Pharisee. The two had altogether different theories. "Thou art a *teacher*," said the one; "Except a man be *born again*," said the other. "Educate" was the watchword of the one; "Regenerate" the watchword of the other. Mankind is perhaps but one large Pharisee. Socially, a Pharisee, with what

diligence and gravity of decorum he keeps cleaning the outside of the cup and of the platter! Morally, a Pharisee, with what proud display he builds the tombs of the prophets, saying, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." No! the ancient world had recourse to bloodshed; the modern resorts to famine. The ancient moral world was like the ancient whited sepulchre — simple whitewash without, uncleanness within. The modern moral world is like the modern churchyard—elaborate flowers above, and corruption below. The reclamation of Nicodemus against any thoroughgoing and inward cleansing would certainly be sympathised with and be re-echoed by it.

The outcry of human nature against this hard condition of entering His kingdom, laid before it by Christ, does not arise altogether from its hardness, but also greatly from ignorance. Perhaps the necessity of it is not seen, but neither is the means to it known. Nicodemus laid his whole stress on the impossibility of it: "Can a man enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Here again we are perplexed by the unnaturalness of Nicodemus' answer; for he can hardly have been unacquainted with the idea of a new birth. Perhaps the grave solemnity of the Lord's manner, and His searching eye, confused the ruler; and in his confusion he caught at the words "born again," and used them in their natural sense, as a sort of weapon of self-defence.

Perhaps, however, Nicodemus used this language as a comparison, meaning to say: "To be born again, even spiritually, when one is old, must be as difficult as to enter the womb and be born again naturally." Or perhaps he reasoned in this way: "The spiritual life cannot be renewed without a renewal of the natural life. The one implies the other. We are not two natures, but one. We grow up spiritually, just while we are growing up naturally. The growth is gradual; but it is once for all. It may be shaped just as the bodily increase; but, when once its shape is taken, it cannot be altered. And the shape is taken unseen, it is true, yet at the same time as the shape of the body, under all the influences about it—taken irrevocably. And as the bodily form, when once old, can no longer be altered; as it cannot again enter into the womb, and be born anew, and enter upon a better and more beauteous development, no more can the spirit return to its infancy, and grow up a holier and a nobler growth. Alas! if being born again is the condition of entering the kingdom, no one will ever enter it, no one once born; at least, surely, no one long born, no one when he is old. Could you chance to light on some little child, newly born, ere its ways were fixed and its habits formed, ere its members had acquired their bent and shape, and were yet soft and flexible, it might perhaps be trained for the kingdom. This little child is born, it is true, but is not yet bred; it is pliant and mouldable, its flesh and soul alike soft and impressible. And as the supple body

may be shaped in any way, when taken early, so the subtle soul may be made to grow up, under almost any form. This young spirit, though born, might yet see the kingdom. But how can a man do so when he is old, when he is not only born and ready to enter upon the spiritual career and life, but when that life lies behind him—lived—gone into the irrevocable past—and his spirit, like his body, has now assumed its mature and unchangeable form? Surely, as the body cannot begin its growth anew, and rise up a perfect form, for its time is over, no more can the spirit, for its life is past too."

If this was Nicodemus' thought, as it may have been, though it may have some error in it it has, alas, far too much of truth. It is not possible, in all senses, to be born again; and even in the sense in which it is possible, it is difficult. Ah! if it were but possible to be little children over again! to begin and live life again, to undo all the evils of our life, to be living and yet without the evils that have gathered about our life, to have no memory of sin, to feel no blots on our soul, to have made no mistakes in life, to have done no wrong, nothing that calls up the blush on our cheek, to have nothing against which we fret and dash ourselves in vain, like poor captive creatures against the iron cage that holds them, torturing ourselves over an irrevocable unworthiness; to have the joy and the unclouded hopefulness, the fresh and unstained powers of the child—to be born again when one is old! Can it be? It both

can and cannot be. With men it cannot be. With God it can be. Men remember; God forgets. Among others and with ourselves, this new birth, this becoming little children, is always imperfect.

However changed we are, we are still, to others, the old men. They are slow to believe in any alteration. Among men, it is long before the man becomes the child again, before he wears himself out of the old reputation, the habits, the temper, the whole combined character he bore, and the memory they had of him. Men do not forget. Only God forgets evil; men remember it. Only God remembers good; men forget it. And it might seem a small thing, that we cannot become little children to men, if only we could become so to ourselves. Yet even this can be but imperfectly. We cannot forget. We cannot undo the past. To recall words which we have spoken, which perhaps only one ear heard, we would give all that we possess; but they have been spoken; and they remain for ever. To undo one deed, or one gesture that hinted a deed, or one secret meditation of a deed, we would give years off our life on earth; but it cannot be undone. The stains will ever lie upon our souls; and, perhaps, the longer we look at them, the deeper they will grow. The falls we made will never be forgotten, nor seem less; rather, the depth we fell will ever be growing more immense.

Ah, the fatal continuity of our life! the torturing fury called the mind! the hideous spectre of ourself that dogs us! Born again! Surely, it is only then that

what we really are appears; and it every day appears the more. The more we become little children, the more shall we seem to ourselves to be the old men—the strong, sinful, adult, hardened men—stout-hearted and far from righteousness. But there is one eye to which we shall seem different, one that will see us to be little children; there is one omniscient, all-embracing memory that will quite forget the past—God's eye, and God's memory. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," born again, a little child, entering the kingdom. To God's eye, we, being one with His Son, shall be all that His Son was; and if we are His, all those words said of Him will, in God's esteem, be said of us. Even that which was said of His birth will be true, in God's thought, of ours: "The holy thing that shall be born shall be called the Son of God." And those words, said of Him, shall be repeated of us, to indicate God's complacency and delight in us, when we go out into the world: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The old man whom men remember and we abhor, God sees transformed into the image of His Son. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." To God we are other; in Christ we are other. In Him we find refuge from ourselves.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

IV. The last thing to notice is Christ's removal of the difficulty, and the explanation of what He means by

"born again," so far as He cares to explain it. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

To the protest, "How can a man be born when he is old?" whether the protest be one of incredulity, or contemptuous wonder, or even ridicule; or whether it be one of despondent hopelessness before an insuperable barrier, Christ replies in two propositions: "Ye *must* be born again—of water and of the Spirit"; and, "Ye *may* be born again; the wind bloweth where it listeth—so is every one that is born of the Spirit." He says in effect: "I speak not of a natural birth, for were you born again naturally, ever so often, it would avail you nothing, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh. I speak of a birth of another kind, and know that it is not impossible. There are powers unseen, that are capable of accomplishing it."

Christ first explains the kind of birth—"born of water and of the Spirit." Keep before your minds the figure and the words, that you may see His meaning: "Born of water and born of the Spirit." He could have said water and spirit; for He means born of that element, water; and of that substance, spirit. But the substance, though spirit, is a Person; and therefore He says, *the*

Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit. But the reference is less to His personality than to His spirituality. Now realise to yourselves the figure *born of*—born of water. The reference is to the ancient mode of baptism by immersion. As one plunged under water for a moment, rises and comes up out of the water, he is born of water. He has come forth from it; and, as he breaks through the clear pure element, and it streams off his whole body, his whole body partakes of the quality of the water: it is clean, it is purified. Every stain is washed away; and he is pure. He is born of water.

And such, also, is being born of spirit. He that comes forth from that element of spirit, in which he has been baptized, has the qualities of spirit, is spiritual. "He that is born of the flesh is flesh. He that is born of the Spirit is spirit." As the child, born into the world, begins to exercise its natural faculties, puts forth its hands, directs its eyes, employs every member after its proper manner, so he that is born of the Spirit finds himself endowed with spiritual capacities, which he begins to exert. He grasps with a spiritual hand, he looks with a spiritual eye, he nourishes himself with spiritual food. Coming forth out of the element of the Spirit, he is spiritual, and begins not a fleshly but a spiritual development.

And then all this, however wonderful, may be. It is not impossible, though it is mysterious. There is such a great Spirit about us, travailing in birth with human souls, bringing them forth, endowing them

with His own qualities, a great Spirit about us like the air, unseen, yet the source of all life, enwrapping us, stirring us with its gentler motions, rising too into hurricanes, and overturning all that opposes. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Christ uses the analogy of the wind, to express a power that is immaterial, subtle, which you can neither command nor measure, which moves in a mysterious way, but whose presence may be felt — "thou hearest the sound thereof"—and whose effects are often tremendous.

This is an exquisite figure for the Spirit, for what may be called the *divine* in human life, for all those immaterial influences which flow in upon us. The wind! how it surrounds us, and forms, even while we are unconscious of it, the very breath of our life! And then how free it is, and self-moving! How fitful almost, and lawless, though we are constrained to believe its motions to be subject to the most rigid law! Man must wait for it. It is above him. It is around him, yet in no way subject to his will. He longs for it; and it will not come. He is absorbed in other things; and, suddenly, it blows around him, whether it come as a gentle breeze, laden with the odours of the hills:

> "Awake, O north wind,
> And come, thou south;
> Blow upon my garden,
> That its spices may flow out";

or whether it come as the tempest rending the rocks, and shattering every proud and lofty thing that resists it:

> "Fear took hold upon them there,
> And pain, as of a woman in travail:
> Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish
> With an east wind."

Man stands, as it were, in the midst of currents; he feels the flow of them, because he is many times an obstacle against which they strike. But the currents are mysterious. Whence they rise, he cannot tell. Whither they flow, he is unaware. This he knows, that he is touched by them; and the touch awakens him; and he lives. He knows, too, that he is "born again"; that these currents have risen far away, in that great ocean of spirit that surrounds our souls; that they are the sweeps and eddies of divine influences, even of the Spirit of God. But they are far beyond him to understand. He cannot tell whence they come; for there are mysteries behind us, which we cannot fathom: neither can he tell whither they go, where they are carrying him to; for there are reaches of life before us, which we cannot measure. But this forgiveness and these new powers give him a new feeling; he knows himself to be another man: all old things are passed away.

This, too, he knows full well; the reality and the power of them: "Thou hearest the sound thereof." As when you hear the ocean roar, or the forests moan, though there be no visible force wrestling with them,

yet you know that a real power has them in its grasp; so, when you see tides of terror or hope rise high in the soul, and it struggles and wrestles as Jacob did in the darkness, like a giant oak with the wind, or as Job did when he cried, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" you know that, though invisible, it is a real power that has the soul in its grasp, even the Spirit of the living God.

Now, in conclusion, let me repeat the Lord's two statements: "Ye *must* be born again," and "Ye *may* be born again." "Ye must be born again." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God": except a man be washed, and have a whole soulful of spiritual faculties awake within him, he cannot see the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom of the spiritual. God is a Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. They that are in the flesh do mind the things of the flesh. If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." We long many a time to be born again after the flesh, to begin life over again. But that is a vain wish; and, even if it could be realised, it would still be vain, so far as the kingdom of God is concerned. Our life might be better, manlier, nobler, purer, more fruitful of help to others. But it would still be a life of the flesh. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." That smiling, speechless babe, whose eye follows you in loving recognition with all its charms of opening life, even that unstained spirit

no less than the sin-stained soul of you who gave it birth, must be born again—"born of water and of Spirit" —washed and quickened.

But ye *may* be born again, even when you are old. There is a power that can effect this, hard though it seems. Have you not known of many being born when they were old? Have not little children taken their rugged fathers by the hand, and led them into the kingdom? Have you not seen them with your own eyes, as well as read of those in Scripture, Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, the blood-stained Manasseh, the dying thief? To mention but another, there came to Christ in the days of His flesh, when He was eating bread at the house of a Pharisee, a woman, who washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. She was old—very old, with every feeling shrivelled, every affection withered, her soul ploughed and furrowed, like her cheek and brow, with anguish. Worn with the pursuit of sin, the wells of joy exhausted, to her eye the world and life a dull monotony and weariness, she was old, too old perhaps even for tears; though now, when born again, her tears flow in floods, and she can weep with the best. She was born again; and her former life of wild unchecked sin and riot she has flung off; and it lies beside her new life, like a gaudy, battered, masquerading suit, beside the spotless robe of white.

And this man of whom we have been speaking, what of him? Old, too, a teacher of Israel, a ruler, a judge, with all his habits formed, his opinions of men and

things matured, his place in the world long taken—what of him? Was he born again, or was he made the means of teaching a lesson lost upon himself? Surely it could not be. Once, twice he appears again in history, and no more. I omit his first appearance, and mention only his last.

The time is three or four years after this. Things had greatly changed in that time. Things had come to a head with the teacher come from God. He was in the hands of His adversaries, to all appearance, an unmasked impostor, who had boasted of powers, not one of which He could put forth to save Himself. He was led away to be crucified. All forsook Him, and fled. Hope was dead. "We trusted that it had been He that should have redeemed Israel." A female relative or two flitted stealthily about the cross. But there was none, of all that once followed Him with Hosannas, now so bold as do Him reverence. And those hands, that once touched the blind eyes, and they saw, are pierced with nails. And the eyes that looked many a time compassion on sorrow, are glazed in death. And the dishonoured body hangs disowned upon the tree. Will no man be bold enough to own it? Will not the force of love break through even the terrible array of the unanimous verdict of the world? It will. And of the two men, who at that moment were strong enough to brave opinion, Nicodemus, the modest, shrinking, timid ruler, was one. "And Joseph of Arimathea besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him

leave. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. So they took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury."

Surely, born again. Surely, in the kingdom, having entered into it through that only gate — being born again.

XI

ZACCHÆUS

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ZACCHÆUS

LUKE xix. 1–10

WERE a person to attempt to detail the causes and the circumstances of his own conversion, he would often give a very confused account. As so many things go to bring about this great result at last, and the mind generally or often emerges then out of a troubled and disordered state, men are such bad judges of the real history of their own mind, that perhaps they rarely lay their finger on the true cause of their being brought to God. And those who are outside, mere spectators of this great transaction between a soul and its Lord, can still less decide, with certainty, on its true history.

What led Zacchæus to seek to see Jesus? Was it that, seeing a great crowd moving along the streets, and being told that Jesus was in the midst, he was suddenly seized with a desire to see that which, to so many other people, seemed remarkable? Or, rather, had he not heard of Jesus before, and of the great revival that He was said to be working, wherever He came? And would not his natural curiosity be thus mixed with a

certain religious feeling? Men rarely act from single motives. The person who comes to church mainly from custom will generally have, in addition, a certain reverence for religion; perhaps, a certain feeling of the need of godliness, and often even some faint desire for it. There is in the minds of people generally a very great reverence for any eminent servant of God; and when he makes his appearance in any place, men crowd to hear him, not out of curiosity altogether, but with a sort of dim desire and hope that he, whom God has so blessed to others, may also bring some message to them. For at bottom we all feel our need; and, with a kind of reverential submissiveness, we would put ourselves in the way of good, when we have an opportunity. Such considerations as these may account for the conduct of Zacchæus here.

The tenth verse seems the summing up of the whole transaction. It contains its moral. Sometimes the Lord left the meaning of His works and parables to be guessed; but here the meaning is so blessed, and embodies in such a degree the very essence of His whole appearance and work, that He seems fearful we might not draw out of it its real contents; and so He Himself adds the principle which is illustrated, saying: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Now, every sinner Jesus saved afforded an illustration of this principle; there must therefore be some reason why the Lord so emphatically affirms that the principle is illustrated here. We have here, surely, a

more vivid and more wonderful instance of the salvation of a lost man, by the Son of man, than we have anywhere else. And it is a great sight to see, more wonderful far than that bush burning and not consumed. Let us turn aside a little to behold it: it may be that, while we are looking, that Seeker and Saviour may find some of us. And that it may be so, let each of us, while looking, think of himself, and cry: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant. Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee."

Now the mere words made use of here are worth noticing:—"Son of man," "seek and save," "lost." There is a singular tenderness and suggestiveness about them, especially about the word "lost." It calls up to our minds, here a house with mourners, and there a dark and dreary abode. It calls up a home with anxious restless hearts and frequent hearkenings for a familiar footstep, long unheard and sadly missed, and eager resolves to forgive the wanderer and fall upon his neck, if he will but return—and there a sullen and dogged persistence in alienation, a sealing up of the heart and a clinching of the feelings against every offer. When God calls a sinner like Zacchæus lost, we feel He is sparing Zacchæus, and, if we may say so, sparing also Himself, using a more gentle term than the reality demands, out of tenderness to the wrong-doer, and also as if He would hide from Himself the extent of the wrong.

Men are fond of this word "lost." They seek to hide realities from themselves by using it. Their little one

is not dead, only "lost"; it has gone where they cannot see it, but they shall find it by and by. The father's son is not a prodigal; he is "lost." All his delinquencies are covered and shielded by that term. To the father he is not one who has disobeyed him, and wearied of him, and found no happiness in his affection, but has longed for more stimulating pleasures, which he has wildly pursued, till he has sunk into deplorable meanness. All these things a brother's hand does not shrink from exposing; but the father's heart will know of none of them. It only knows this, that his son has gone from him, and that he has been left alone. "This my son was lost, and is found." And our Heavenly Father speaks in the same way of us; and His Son came to seek and to save the lost.

The idea of "lost" applied to sinners is derived from the case of the straying sheep. The sheep shows its waywardness and thoughtlessness and discontent by straying. But, when strayed, what is most prominent is the danger it is in. The wolf may seize it, the torrent may sweep it away, it may be dashed to pieces over the precipice. When sinners use the figure of themselves, it is their waywardness that they mean to express: "All we like sheep have gone astray." When the Lord uses the figure of them, it is in pity for their danger and forlornness: "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But lost men are compared with other things besides the wandering sheep. And if we look at the three

parables in the 15th chapter, we shall be able to reach the exact ideas expressed in the term "lost." The woman had ten pieces of silver; and she lost one of them. The man had a hundred sheep; and one went amissing. The father had two sons; and one of them turned prodigal.

First, In all, only a part was lost; in two cases, only a very insignificant part. Much remained; much of the same kind. But the loser was uneasy over his loss. He was regretful and restless; he could not content himself with what he still had. His heart followed what he had lost.

And so, *second*, he put forth great effort to find the lost. It is not the value of the thing lost, but we cannot bear to lose it. We think of our loss, till it absorbs our mind, and becomes more valuable in our eyes than all that is left. We leave the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness, and go after that one which is lost.

And, *third*, when it is found, we are overjoyed. It is so very precious in our eyes; we think it meet that we should make merry. Thus, when God calls us lost, we learn that we and others were once very near to Him; but while they remained, we went astray. But He is sorrowful and uneasy over our loss. What remains with Him does not content Him. And He puts forth great efforts to find us; and when any of us is found, He rejoices.

Of course, all this is general. If we inquire a little more closely into the way in which Zacchæus might be named "lost," it may help to bring more closely home to ourselves our own loss. Christ's emphatic statement,

after saving Zacchæus, "that He came to seek and to save the lost," seems to imply that there was something peculiar in his case. Even if it be a case of wide generality, yet it illustrates very signally what is meant by "the lost."

I. Let us therefore consider, first, how Zacchæus was lost.

Zacchæus was by profession a publican, that is, a collector of taxes under the Roman government. Now, the Roman customs' officer differed from our own in this; ours is paid a fixed salary, and the taxes which he gathers are paid by him into the national treasury. It is no advantage to him to gather much or little. His remuneration is independent of the amount of taxes he collects. But among the Romans the tax-gatherer bought the privilege of gathering. He paid a large sum for the office; and the taxes were his own. Thus the more he gathered, the more he gained. There was great temptation here to extortion and oppression. No doubt, the customs were fixed by law. But there might be many ways of evading the law. The tax-gatherer had much in his power. He knew the law; and those whom he oppressed did not know it. And unless his exactions were altogether ruinous, there was little fear of exposure. If he was moderate, however steady in his extortion, he might carry it on at his pleasure.

In these circumstances it was not easy to be honest; it was not easy to be merciful. Zacchæus seems to confess that he had been both unjust and unmerciful.

When converted, he sought to make some reparation for the wrongs of his former life. "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation"—there was his dishonest abuse of his office. "The half of my goods I give to the poor"—there, perhaps, was his conscience telling him that he had grown rich on the miserable exactions he had wrung out of the hands of the poor. Thus, he was just a greedy man, who had used without scruple the tricks and opportunities of his business. And so he was lost.

And yet he might not be a very bad man, as things went, or as they go now. If he was very bad, I leave you to judge. When a poor buyer comes into your shop, ignorant of the value of things, and you lay an exorbitant price on what you sell him; or when you present a thing inferior, and exact the price of a good article, you are doing in your place what Zacchæus did in his. Or, when you palm off adulterated goods upon the poor—or perhaps even when in combination with others, either formal or tacit, you keep goods at a higher price than fair commercial principles require—you are, like him, unjust and unmerciful. And, like him, you are lost. It is not well possible that a man, guilty of such things, can be other than lost. It needs not that a woman be an open wanderer from the paths of virtue, that she be lost. If her life be one round of pleasures, stealing her heart, leaving her no time to learn the realities of things, or come to the knowledge of God; or if she be filled with domestic duties, cum-

bered with serving, troubled about many things—entangled with the things of this life—she may be no less lost.

For to be lost, however tremendous the meaning that lies in the word and in the thing, does not imply any uncommonness of vice, or monstrosity in wickedness. To be lost is to wander, and to miss the true way of human life, whatever that be; to go off the track, and get where the true path is no more visible, the consequence being that the true end of human life is not reached. And it will matter little whether you nearly reach it, or miss it very widely, if you do not reach it. The word "lost" also suggests that the lost one is entangled in influences that prevent other influences reaching him, as a child astray in a thick forest can neither discover traces of the home it wandered from, nor make itself seen by those who would rescue it. When things so stand up about a man, as to keep God out of his sight, and hinder influences from reaching him,—whatever the things be, whether business even justly carried on; or thought of the highest kind; or pleasure however lawful; or cares though most necessary—then he is lost.

But, besides this, that Zacchæus' profession threw many temptations in his way, into which he often fell, and so was lost, there was another thing about it, that helped to deepen his loss. The office of tax-collector was looked down upon, and disliked. Respectable men did not enter it. It was a foreign service; and the national

feeling was against it. And being held disreputable, only the waifs and offcasts that floated on the outskirts of society were willing to go into it. Publicans and sinners were naturally coupled together. Thus, when a man entered the ranks of this class, public opinion had already passed judgment on him. He was despised and avoided. Men held no intercourse with him. There thus arose a sort of war, on the side of the publicans, against society.

The dangers of this state are very obvious. Being excluded from general society, the publicans naturally consorted together; and their society, I daresay, was often not quite choice. Perhaps they consoled themselves for the loss of pleasures, which they might call sentimental, by gazing on their accumulating gold, which was at least substantial. But there are few men that can long hold out against society. If men judge us to be bad, and treat us as bad, we very speedily become what we are considered to be. No doubt self-respect may keep a man up, after the respect of the world has failed him. But only for a time. Men are not strong enough to hold out against the judgment of their fellow-men. When a man falls into any evil, if it do not get abroad, he may recover himself. The respect of men, which he still has, may restore him. But when his evil becomes public, it is surprising how rapidly he goes down after that. Thus the poor publican was lost—doubly lost. He had every temptation to be bad, and no motive on the other hand to

goodness. Every evil was imputed to him, and he got credit for no good. He was lost.

It is a very dangerous thing when society tends to break, in this way, into castes and classes opposed to each other. It is very prejudicial to religion. And certainly it seems possible to detect the beginnings of this state of things in our own country. The distance between employers and operatives seems gradually widening. And equally so the distance between masters and servants. But there is not only a distance; there is a breach and antagonism. The opposition no doubt is due to the distance. What the distance is due to, ought hardly perhaps to be discussed here. But it seems partly due to this, that holdings and businesses are now much larger than formerly. There are none, or at any rate few, small enough to be stepping-stones for the servant to rise to be a master. Thus the serving class is more and more becoming a caste, more and more being bound down to remain for ever what it is. The class that employs is gradually rising; the class that is employed is remaining at least stationary in social position, or gradually sinking. And thus the two classes stand more and more apart. And the inferior class, feeling or fancying itself looked down upon, becomes, in its pride and independence, defiant. They will do their work and take their wage; but sympathy, or courtesy, or good feeling forms no part of the bargain.

Now, this is very detrimental to the working class.

For there is no restraint upon its members. They form, to some extent, a section by themselves; and society cares little for them. They forfeit little by falling into evil. The fear of losing respectability does not uphold them. And, on the other hand, their antagonism to the class above them makes them also opposed to their religion, if they have any. They will have none of their goodness, or their good advices. They wish to be let alone. Now, I am not judging at whose door these things lie. Partly, no doubt, at everyone's door. But what I am pointing out is, that it is a state of things not only dangerous socially but quite fatal to religion. For you have seen how far some members of that outlying, unattached class may fall. It was thus that the publicans fell, and were lost. Such divisions in society are opposed to the very essence of Christianity. There was nothing that Christ set Himself so persistently against. He was the friend of publicans and sinners. And here, in opposition to the murmurs of those who were grieved that He was gone to be guest of a man that was a sinner, He proclaimed that He knew of no such distinction: "Forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

The history of Zacchæus, as already sketched, shows his circumstances, and how, under the influence of these circumstances, he might have drifted into evil. No doubt, all of us have a chance of doing well, although sometimes, since some are taught to do ill from the very cradle, the chance may be very small. Nevertheless, we

are all put upon our trial. Sometimes, we are aware that we are on our trial; and sometimes, the trial is over and we have fallen, ere we come to know that we are being tried. When a man does evil thoughtlessly, overcome by sudden temptation, his fall is not so great. To appearance he may fall very deeply indeed, even sink into shameful evil, beneath which there seems no possibility of sinking. But yet his fall is really less than that of the man who sins after reflection. In the two cases, the outward acts may be the same; but, in the second case, there is a mental operation, a change of inner condition, which is awanting in the other, a voluntary decision on the side of sin; and that is an act of very profound significance. The outward evil consequences, too, may not differ; and the judgment and reprobation of men may fall, with equal heaviness, on both. Yet the case of the man who fell or drifted into evil, or was suddenly seduced into it, or, being bewildered by a complexity of circumstances which he could not disentangle, chose to do what, though perhaps he thought it best, turned out to be the very worst—the case of this man is far less evil, so far, at least, as he is concerned, than that of one who has with deliberation done wrong.

Now Zacchæus' case was perhaps of the latter kind. He does not seem to have drifted into evil; he seems rather to have consciously chosen it. No Jew could enter the ranks of the publicans, unobserved by other Jews, or without a struggle with himself. It was a very

decided step, one that had to be taken over great obstacles. The service was unpatriotic; and what was unpatriotic was also irreligious, and sinful. He who undertook it was held to be doing a wrong against his country and against God. It was a trade unlawful and accursed. This was the general opinion, and no doubt shared by Zacchæus. So much was this the general opinion, that tax-gatherers were classed with criminals as publicans and sinners. And our Lord Himself on one occasion speaks as if even He regarded the publican as outside the pale of Israel, for He denounces one who refuses to hear the Church, as "a heathen man and a publican."

Zacchæus, therefore, must have believed he was doing a great wrong—a great crime against his country, and a great sin against God—when he became, for the sake of gain, a servant of the Romans. This was his opinion of the step, before he took it. This was what his conscience proclaimed, when he was taking it. Nevertheless, he took it. You can conceive that he did not take it all at once. He hesitated perhaps long. His better nature struggled against the snare. All the holy influences of his early training gathered themselves about him, and held him back. He felt the appeal of friends, if he had any friends. He saw the warning glance of God; and many a time, perhaps, he resolved to choose the way of poverty and wisdom. But the tempting lure again glittered before his eyes, and drew him on, till at last, wearied and distracted, he took the fatal step.

He put down his conscience and his better nature. He loved the world rather than God; and sinned against knowledge. "And if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins."

This I consider to be the deepest element of Zacchæus' loss—his resistance of conviction, and his overcoming it on this great occasion—his choosing a way of life in the direct face of it. He could not forget having done this. He had deliberately chosen sin. He knew he had done it. Perhaps he felt as if it had been done irrevocably; for it hardens one very greatly, to do what one feels to be wrong. It blunts and turns the edge of one's conscience terribly. And if it be any very great occasion on which we do the wrong, and resist our convictions, as when, at the beginning of life, we choose a profession which, we fear, is somehow incompatible with godliness; or if, while under convictions of sin, we go wilfully against them, because they interfere with our prospects; or even allow them to subside through busy attention to other things, then our act, on such an occasion, may be said to decide our whole life. For the mind has a dislike to take up a thing again, after it has decided on it. We are unwilling to entertain religious convictions, after having once disposed of them. They do not readily come back. And, if they come, it is generally in a weaker form. The one great act usually decides our case. And we feel it to be decisive. We feel we are lost;

and, like Zacchæus, we almost acquiesce in our own loss.

II. Let us now look a little at the more pleasing side of the picture, and consider how Zacchæus was saved.

Zacchæus, as we have seen, was lost, lost very deeply—lost through adverse circumstances which were terribly against him; lost by resistance to his own convictions of the truth; lost because he was, though now perhaps old, not another from what he was when young; and the consciousness of that resistance remained with him, and he felt or suspected, with that dim kind of moral suspicion that haunts men, that he was lost. And, perhaps, he partially acquiesced in his own loss; lost because there was flung upon him the shadow of the reprobation of his fellow-men, a shadow too dark and oppressive for him to be able to break through to the light of heaven, and too dark for the light of heaven to break through to him. For he did not know, nor dream, that one was come from heaven to earth to seek him—the Son of man, who came to seek and to save the lost.

Christ has a reason for calling Himself here the *Son of man*. It is the widest and most general name He can call Himself by; and therefore, to the lost, the most hopeful and consoling. He calls Himself by no party name. He is the Son of man, the man Christ Jesus. Distinctions among men, limitations of the idea "man," have no meaning to Him. He is the brother of all men; of the Pharisee, if he is a man; but also of the

publican, because he too is a man, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, but Christ is all and in all. These limitations form no part of human nature, and the Lord has none of them. But He has all that is truly man—all feelings that are truly human, all affections that distinguish men, all sympathy and skill and experience, that the most gifted can lay claim to. "He was made in all points like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining unto God." And He came to seek and to save the lost. Surely the lost need not despond, if such a seeker be in quest of them, with such skill as He has, and such insight; and such instinctive feeling of their whereabouts, from being Himself the Son of man; and such pity for them, and such love, coming into the world for this end, and laying down His life for them; and there being, too, that about Him which they on their side instinctively recognise, when He comes before them, or calls them. His sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. What lost one need despair of being found by this seeker?

And yet, so lost are they, that even He needs to seek them. He must lay plans for their recovery. It is a work of skill, unparalleled skill, to find His way to them; it takes the power of God and the wisdom of God. No mere exercise of omnipotence will find a lost sinner; it is the putting forth of a rarer divine effort than that. Of old it was not enough to present Himself bodily to sinners' eyes; nor is it enough to speak of Him

now. His contemporaries did not recognise Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The lost have to be sought, and the roads that reach them are often very difficult; but He tries them all. He tries sickness. Or He tries a long, prosperous, almost blessed life. Or He tries a life chequered and uneven, not like a long, fruitful vale, plenteously watered and waving with rich crops, on which the sunshine falls all the day; but one of mountains and deep valleys, mountains whose tops are gilded with splendid light and touch heaven, and valleys where dense fogs and heavy shadows fall, and that sink to the abyss. And there, up in the sunlight, or down in the valley of humiliation, He comes, seeking the lost.

In all that happens to you, He is; approaching you in every circumstance, wooing your mind by every event, striving to get Himself into every feeling, awakening every deeper emotion, in the hope that the emotion may be so deep that He may be felt; and fostering every beautiful reflection, in the hope that the perfection of beauty may be attained, so that your mind may body out in the thin air, or the vast world, or the dark unknown, a Face—the face of the Son of man. Has He not sought to find you for long, and by many ways? Even when you were but an infant, did He not come and stand over you, and put His hands upon you, and bless you? You were familiar with Him, and learned to lisp His name, and fell nightly into softest slumber, calling on Him who gathers the lambs with His arm

and carries them in His bosom. Surely He was seeking you then, putting out His tenderest efforts to find you; and surely He hoped that you would not escape Him. But, like the wayward lamb in its thoughtless gambols, when almost found, you bounded away from Him, and were lost.

Then perhaps, after years, He was again upon your track. He again had found a way that He thought would lead to you. She, on whose knees you first heard His name, and who had been early found by Him, was departing to be with Christ, which to her was far better. But she had one thing on her heart, before she went. She knew or suspected, for the fears of such an one are keen and penetrating, that you had not yet been found. And she sought to bring Him and you together, ere she went. And you were very near Him in that hour. In the presence of death, and immortality, and such triumphant hopes, and gazed upon by such eager, anxious, beseeching, dying looks, you vowed to yield yourself; and you thought, perhaps for a time, that you had been found. But it turned out otherwise. And since then, though this patient Shepherd is still seeking, He has never again been so near you—perhaps He never may. We speak nowadays a good deal of finding Christ; and there is nothing to be said against the expression. But here the expression is inverted: it is He that finds us.

It is amazing to see the assiduity of Christ in this search. For His eager, restless wandering, from end

to end of the land, is but the outward expression of His never-ceasing search. He had to seek His lost ones. And it seems as if He Himself did not know where they might be found; as if He did not, as the Son of man, know those whom the Father had given Him, till He met them face to face. But He went on, restless and inquiring; groping around all hearts; presenting Himself before all eyes; looking into all countenances as for some lost friend of old, and when an unmeaning gaze met His own, turning away in disappointment and in sadness—till at last, amidst some heaving crowd, He stands before a man, a publican, a sinner; and there flashes upon Him the joy of a discovery and a recognition; and He Himself is arrested, and necessity lies upon Him to save this lost one whom He has found: "To-day I must abide at thy house."

III. Finally, it is worth while to consider the kind of character here saved by Christ: A man who, a great while ago, had deliberately done evil, and given himself to the world, — so long ago, that perhaps he did not think much of it now, but, when he did, he felt, or had the suspicion, that his chance of life was over, and this feeling kept him from wandering often into that question at all, — a busy, thriving man — not a happy man, but a very fortunate one. This history is the gospel of all like him —and perhaps they are many — who have had convictions and got over them, early struggles which have long ago mastered them, and who have a suspicion, a kind of dread,

that they did an irrevocable thing in those days, and threw their chance of grace away. This gospel says it was no irrevocable thing. A man's own fears, the world, the Pharisees, the disciples even, may call it irrevocable, and murmur that their Saviour should throw Himself into such company. But Jesus Himself revokes this seemingly irrevocable doom: "He seeks and saves the lost."

And now is not this scene at Jericho repeated here to-day? We are assembled, a congregation of people. And is not the reason of our assemblage this: that Jesus is to pass this way? Shall we be content merely to be in the crowd, but get ourselves no sight of Him? There must be something worth seeing, that gathers men so together. Let us resolve to see it. And whatever impediment lies in the way, let us get over it, get over it in some way, even if the way should seem not quite becoming our position, and somewhat hurtful to our pride. The thing is to see Him; the manner of it matters little. And, if we be resolute, it may be that we, in whose way lie many difficulties of seeing Him at all, may see more of Him than others—may see Him, and be seen by Him, and be called to, above all others; and may have Him to our homes and in our houses—houses where He never came before.

We see very little of this transaction, which was of such moment to Zacchæus. The outward history of it may be told in a sentence. But great mysteries were going on behind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth,

and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." All that we hear of is that this prophet, whom the crowds followed, offered to go home with Zacchæus to his house; and that Zacchæus, whether he was surprised or no, gladly accepted His offer, and that they went together; and that, after they had been some time together, a strange change came over the publican; and he spoke of feeding the poor, and of making restitution for his former wrong-doing; and that the Lord Himself seemed to think the change very great, and used lofty language of it, saying: "This day is salvation come to this house." The Son of man had found him, had reached him, and laid His hand on him. He had drawn him into His fellowship. He had made him *know* Him.

Whether it was the things Jesus did, the condescension He showed, and the kindness He exhibited, or whether it was the words He used, that led to the change, we are not told. It was surely a great thing for Jesus to propose to go home with this man to his house; and no doubt, when there, He spoke very searching words, that opened up to Zacchæus views quite unknown to him before. But, whatever it was, the publican was raised to a pitch of great excitement and earnestness, starting up to his feet at the Lord's words; for we read that Zacchæus stood and said: "Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." The Son of man had found him.

Considering how unlike these two were, we almost wonder that Jesus reached the man's heart. And yet, perhaps, there were many things in common between them. For Zacchæus was a man rather shunned by society, proscribed by it, and so driven within himself; made moody, silent, resolute, hard; going his own way, compelled to live without the sympathy of men; and, we need not doubt, in many moments crushed and broken by men's judgment of him; cut off from the general current and tide of life; in the world, yet, from the very deepness of his loss, not of it. The man Christ Jesus was like him in His relation to the world, infinitely higher above it than Zacchæus lay below it; yet, out of it too—thrown in upon Himself, reserved and self-dependent, knowing both the resources and the agonies of such exclusion. And thus Zacchæus was a brother to Christ; and the way to his heart was open, and its doors flung wide. If Christ therefore knew Zacchæus, and the way to find him, a man at the opposite pole from Him, can you be beyond His reach? or can any state or manner of life or mental condition lie beyond His power? Think what this man was, and what he became; and know that Christ is able to save unto the uttermost.

How low Zacchæus was in the moral scale! and yet how high he rose! From being hard, he became very merciful; and from being niggard and unjust, romantically liberal — a true child of Abraham, the friend of God. Think of him as he was, and as he

became; born again, his flesh came as the flesh of a little child; and his were a child's feelings, a child's repentance, a child's ingenuousness of confession, a child's heart and liberality, a child's resolutions. Oh! delicate hand of the Son of man, that could grope its way around the dead heart-strings of this hardened man, and make them tingle, and nerve them into humanity and into godliness again! Think of this, and be persuaded; and let no consideration drive the persuasion from you, that Christ has something in common with you—some side of Him with some side of you—whereby He can reach you, can find you—can seek and save the lost.

XII

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

XII

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

MARK x. 17–22

WHEN we read this brief story, it strikes us as if we witnessed a tragedy. It is as if we saw one struggling in the sea, making desperate efforts to save himself, and almost grasped by the strong arm of another; but, just when we thought him saved, he was swept away, and perished. Possibly we might feel ourselves entitled, as some have done, to think that the end of the story, which we read, was not its real end. Though we do not hear of this young man again, his history may have taken a different turn, and ended otherwise than it ends in the narrative. This is possible. Meantime, we shall hold to what of the story is set before us.

The Evangelist, in the preceding verses, records how some brought little children to Jesus, and His disciples were for hindering them; and how Jesus gladly received the little children, and blessed them, saying: "Of such is the kingdom of God." The two stories are put close together; but whether to point a contrast between the little children and this young man, or because there

appeared to be some similarity between the two cases, is difficult to say. The young man had certainly some of the character of the child in him; and our Lord desired him to enter His kingdom, and seemed to give him a special invitation to be a personal disciple, when He said to him: "Come, follow Me."

The real lesson, the tragic lesson of the incident, will not be felt by us, if we read the story wrongly. And we shall read it entirely wrong, if we in any way depreciate this youth; if we think him hypocritical, pretentious, or superficial, or anything but profoundly sincere and in earnest, and a character true and beautiful. It is because he was all this, that the story comes to us with such a sad and heavy meaning in it.

There are two general points in the passage, though it is not possible to keep the things quite separate, namely, the part played by the young man, and the words spoken by our Lord.

I. The part played by the young man.

He came running and, kneeling to Jesus, said: "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus pointed him to the commandments of God, "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour thy father and mother." And he answered, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." Now this answer was given in all sincerity and honesty. The man had lived a blameless life. He had been pure, upright, and truthful in his relations to men; dutiful and affectionate in

his relations to his parents. He said nothing of himself but what was true, transparently true. Our Lord in no way questioned the statement about himself which he made; He perceived at once the kind of character before Him. And, looking upon him, He loved him. He was a lovely character—pure, without malice, truthful, affectionate. The Lord Jesus, who knew what was in man, looking on him, loved him.

Now there are such characters still. No doubt there are many in some good measure resembling this young man, young men and young women who have kept these things from their youth. There are those whose lives have been pure, who have been generous, and have cherished no ill-will to others; who have been truthful, scorning falsehood and insincerity; and who have been pitiful and considerate to the weak and the aged—those whose youthful brows are bound with a crown of the natural virtues. This gospel says to all of you of this sort, that Jesus Christ, when He looks upon you, loves you. He loves you with a special love, and desires you for His kingdom; for you are nearer to Him, liker to Him, than others are. Though possessing only what we call the natural virtues and moral excellences, you are lovely in His eyes. Before you go further, and are not yet strictly His disciples, when you live a pure life and are dutiful, when you shun uncleanness and vice, when you are truthful and upright, and scorn meanness, the Lord Jesus, looking on you, loves you.

Now we are sometimes apt, I do not say, to let our

doctrines or our theology carry us too far, but to draw conclusions from our doctrines which carry us too far. When we look at any moral life, however lovely it may be, we know it is imperfect. We know that if we are to find salvation, it will not be by our own life or our own merits, but by the merits of another. "In Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." "There is no difference, being justified freely by His grace." And knowing this, we are apt to disparage virtue, and to think of all lives as being equally worthless.

But this is to go much too far. In God's sight the most beautiful life has stains on it, many stains; yet to God and to Christ there are lives that are comparatively beautiful, while others are altogether unlovely. We who are men see the distinction; and the Son of God sees it also. Let us not fancy anything else. Let us not fall into any way of thinking, which would obliterate the eternal distinctions of purity and vice, of truthfulness and falsehood, of dutifulness and disobedience to parents. Let us not think that the Son of man, from His place in heaven, does not perceive the difference. Let us not forget that the pure, truthful character is lovely in His sight, and that it is especially lovely in the young. Our Lord loves all. He came to seek and to save the lost. He was the Friend of sinners. And there may be, in His love for the prodigals among men involved in great sins, elements of tenderness and emotion and a depth that cannot be fathomed; but, with all this, we must do

justice to the language of the gospel, and say that He loves such as this young man was, with a special love.

And there is another way of thinking, into which we sometimes fall, which it is scarcely wise to cherish. We are sometimes tempted to think that, so far as salvation is concerned, it is really an advantage to a man to be a great sinner, rather than to be a good moral character. The first is nearer the kingdom of heaven than the other. The one can be more readily made to have a sense of sin, and thus to feel the need of a Saviour, than the other. Pure and high-minded men, who have lived just and reputable lives, and pursued an even tenor of conduct, have had few mental struggles, and the soil of their character has not been riven up to any depth; and, never having fallen into open sins, they have little sense of sinfulness. It is difficult therefore to awaken in them the sense of sin; and they remain unimpressed, when others whose sins are grievous come with joy to the Saviour, even as the publicans and the harlots pressed into the kingdom of heaven, leaving the Pharisees without.

Now, no doubt, every state of mind has its special temptations. And if to be a great sinner were always equivalent to feeling oneself a great sinner, it would be an advantage to be a great sinner. But how far is this from being the case! Is not the effect of sin just to deaden a man's sense of sin, so that, the greater a sinner he is, the more dead he is to his own sinful-

ness? When one who is very sinful is made to feel his sin, then his action may be prompt, and his sense of grace deep. He will love much, being forgiven much. But what is required of men is, not to be flagrant sinners, but to have a sense of sin. Is there not, then, enough of evil in the best of men to make them respond to the truth, and to the Spirit convincing them of sin? And will men who lead reputable lives be slower to respond to this than those who are great sinners? There may be examples of this; but, as a rule, it is hardly to be believed.

There are cases perhaps when, taking his life all in all, it may be, in the gracious providence of God, an advantage for a man to have fallen into some open sin. Such an open transgression may reveal to the man himself what he perhaps was scarcely conscious of before, the real condition of his heart; and he may be both humbled and alarmed. We speak sometimes of men being overtaken in a sin, and of their being, through a sudden temptation, surprised into a fall, out of all relation to their general character. It is very doubtful if our diagnosis of such cases be the right one. There may be such instances; but men usually act in character — not perhaps in accordance with their whole character, for characters are usually mixed, but in accordance with some bias in their character.

The history of those falls, which we call surprises, is in most cases this. The sin, into which the man has at last openly fallen, was one often cherished in

his mind; he dwelt on it in desire, and acted it in thought, until it became familiar to him: then, probably, he had gone even further, having in various ways approached the actual doing of it, in actions or conduct that hinted it, and led to the brink of it, although he was still able to stop short of it: until finally, familiar to his mind, and even approached in conduct, it at last overmasters him, and he commits it openly. Probably, this is the history of most of those cases where men are supposed to fall before a sudden temptation. But such falls, at any rate, may be used by God to reclaim a man. They reveal to him the true state of mind which he had been indulging; they put a construction upon his past actions, which he hardly thought of, when he committed them; and they awaken him to the position in which he stands, and show him the manner of man he is.

But it would be very unwise to conclude, from instances of this kind, that very sinful men are nearer the kingdom of God, or more likely to enter it, than those whose lives are blameless. This would be contrary to all reason, for the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Men are drawn into the fellowship of Christ in many ways. Perhaps the chief way is by having the sense of sin awakened in their minds. And this sense of sin, from which Christ is the saviour, will always be awakened in them sooner or later, whether it be at the beginning, or through their fellowship with Him. Even the early

disciples entered into His fellowship in many ways. They were drawn by Him, some in one way and some in another. He appealed to their religious minds and hearts on all sides. And it was those that waited for the Consolation of Israel that most readily hailed His coming.

We are apt to be carried away by a few great examples, and to think that it is the greatest sinners who make the most brilliant saints. But one who is a great sinner may become so, because he is a strong man, because he has vigour and power of character, which he throws even into his sins; and thus he acquires notoriety as a sinner. And if, by the mercy of God, he should be changed, the same strength of character will continue to distinguish him; and he will become a great saint. And because we are all sinners, the influence of such a man on the world will be great. His very depth of character will turn to account the consciousness of the change wrought in him; and he will be able to speak to men, with power, both of sin and grace. Such men were David and Augustine and Bunyan, and many more. These were all great men,—great in sin and great in godliness. But we must not make them types, and fancy that before one can be a great saint it is needful to be a great sinner. In spite of the great influence of such men upon the world, it is better to be of a different sort. Were the choice offered to me, I would rather be Jonathan than David; I would rather be John than Peter or Paul; rather some poor nameless

saint than Bunyan. I would forego the influence and the name; and, in the narrowest possible sphere, content myself with clasping to my heart the assurance that Jesus Christ, looking on me, loved me.

To return to the history of this young man, does it not show that a pure moral life, instead of keeping men back, is the very soil out of which rise new impulses, that press men forward? Though he had done the external duties of life faithfully from his youth up, he was not satisfied or at ease. His soul reached forth to the future. His thoughts were occupied with an eternal life. This seemed to him so great a thing, that his past life was not adequate. It was not perhaps so much reflection upon his past, that made him think it unworthy of the eternal life. It was rather an unconscious and instinctive longing. Desires rose up in his dissatisfied heart, ideals stood out before him; or, perhaps, he groped after something higher rather than clearly perceived it. It was the very life that he had been living, that caused this craving for greater fulness; it seemed, as with the forces of spring, to be blossoming and putting forth buds towards a better fruit: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

Probably the form in which he puts the question shows the school to which he belonged. It shows, at least, to what an extent men are the products of their time, and share its ways of thinking. Even the most original of men, however far before others they may be in some things, have the substratum, the deepest soil of

their minds, in common with others of their time. While they shoot far ahead of others in particular lines, striking out one or two conceptions that mark an epoch, their general ways of thinking and feeling are those of their day. Now, in his day, men's highest idea of righteousness was, keeping the law. This was their duty; and its reward would be that God would bring in His kingdom in an external way, by some great divine miracle, and give them eternal life. Men's ideal always was to do something. And this man's conceptions ran on the same line—what thing shall I do? He was prepared to undertake anything however great, to make any sacrifice that might be imposed. No doubt, in accordance with his time, he thought of some external work, and had not thought so much of a condition of mind. He was therefore taken aback, when Christ proposed a self-denial that cut to the very heart.

Yet while he was in ignorance—an ignorance which he shared with most in his day and which was the very atmosphere in which he lived—we cannot but wonder at another feature in his character. He had none of the pride or self-righteousness of the Pharisee; he came running, and kneeled to Jesus. He had no contempt for others; not being at rest within himself, he readily thought that others might know the way of life better than he. To us now, his submission of such a question to Jesus may not seem remarkable; but, considering the house out of which he came, it was remarkable. We must judge men by their circumstances. If you had

been a Pharisee of that day, would your pride have submitted itself before Jesus? But this young ruler had no pride, no superciliousness; he was seeking light, or rather life, and with such desire, that he tried every open door. It is a strange picture of a mind—a picture of a human mind; and we stand before its efforts, and its possibilities, and its destinies, with awe and terror.

II. The words of Jesus to the young man.

In many of the answers our Lord gave to men, there is something hard to understand. We are surprised at the way He responded to this young man, full of yearnings, and brimming over with enthusiasms; and at His cold reference of him to the law, as, with a jerk of the head, He said to him: "Thou knowest the commandments." We all know the commandments. If the commandments were all we needed, why was *He* in the world? And then was it wise, or at all events was it not harsh, to put this youth just at once to so tremendous a test: "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor?" Might not gentler, more cautious dealing have been attended with happier results? Was it well just to throw him on his haunches at once by so sudden a pulling of the rein? Perhaps, in His treatment of men, we may trust the wisdom of Christ, and His compassion.

It is possible that the form, in which Christ put the demand He made on the man, was due to the circumstances and the manner of man He had before Him: "Sell all that thou hast; and come, follow Me." Still, if we consider it, it is just the same answer as He always

gave, the same thing that He always said: "If any man loveth father or mother more than Me, he is not worthy of Me. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life shall find it." There is, under all the variety of expression, a monotony, an identity, in His answers, that shows that He has in His mind a principle which He is ever striving to express.

What, then, is the principle which Christ expresses in these two phrases: "Sell all that thou hast; and come, follow Me?" It can be no other than this. He says to each of us: "Strip yourself of every possession, cut away every affection, disengage yourself from all things, be as if you were a naked soul, alone in the world; be a man merely, and then be God's. Sell all that thou hast, and follow Me! Reduce yourself down, if I may say so, till nothing remains but your consciousness of yourself; and then cast this self-consciousness at the feet of God in Christ."

In form, our Lord's answer looks like what the man asked, proposing some work to him to do; but, in truth, it is just setting Christianity before him. The law, or, as we name it nowadays, morality, never can go to the bottom of things. It cannot strike out the true idea. It speaks always of doing works; it will give to God the best that it possesses. But what Christ proposes is, not doing this or that, or giving some great thing, but giving ourselves. It is not our works, but ourselves, that He wants. "I beseech you that you present your bodies a living sacrifice." It is to get us face to face

with God as persons first. And it is, no doubt, just here that Paul's dislike to the law lies. It is not merely that men cannot keep the law, and that by deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified, and trusting to it can be nothing but destruction. It is not merely this. This is true; but more is true. The apostle dislikes the notion of law. Men cannot keep the law; and he is secretly glad that they cannot.

Law and true religion are contradictory of one another. Law is always putting something between a man and God, works—which thing shall I do? And the reward is a debt. This is not the true relation of man and God. That relation is one of grace—grace to a person, not a reward for works. In a great house, the master of the house sustains two relations. He is related to those who serve him; and to them he gives their hire, which is the reward of their service. But he is related also to his children. And this relation is of another kind; it is a relation of two persons, with nothing between, heart to heart. This is the closest, the ideal relation of beings to one another. And it is the true relation of God to men. All other relations are false. Nothing can come between, not even works; if works come between, men are only servants, not sons. The works follow the right relation, as the child's obedience arises from his being a child.

Thus men and God are truly brought together. You remember the great romancer's story of the young woman who trudged all the way to London, barefooted

and through many risks, in order to save her condemned sister's life. She had no faith in representations made to the king, in intermediaries between her and him, in any pleading of her merits or the merits of her father's house. She would see his face, and he would see hers; and she would be accepted. And so the sinner himself —himself, not anything that he does—comes before God sitting on His throne of grace. The old, old doctrine of justification by faith, placed first, at the beginning of our life unto God, is not only the great truth of our faith; it is the only true philosophy of religion.

Our Lord, having bidden the young man renounce all, said to him, "Follow Me." The life of Jesus always illustrated the truth He taught, and the principles of His kingdom. He did not lay on the young man a burden which He did not touch with one of His fingers. It was His own yoke that He laid on him. Christ's poverty and the fact that He possessed nothing were not in order to show pity or sympathy with the poor, but in order to show the nature of His religion, which is just man and God together,—man with nothing, an absolutely naked soul, possessing nothing, casting itself upon God. He came into the world; and, though the world was made by Him, He owned nothing in it. The patriarchs possessed at least a grave in Canaan, which they could call their own; and a grave is, after all, the only property that remains with us here: but our Lord borrowed even His grave. Though Lord of all, He had

not where to lay His head. The cattle on a thousand hills were His; and yet He depended on others for His daily bread. His meat and drink was to do the will of His Father. Though in this world, He lived in an unseen world. He was merely Himself; and then He was God's. Had the young man thus understood Christ and obeyed His command, he would soon have been found exclaiming in triumph with the apostle: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness."

"But he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." His countenance fell at the proposal made to him. The ideal set before him was too high, not perhaps as an ideal to contemplate, but as one practically to attain. He could not do it. With sorrow he felt he could not do it. Yes, the story does read like a tragedy.

This young man is a type of very many, a type of all the better class of minds. A man of a high and lovely character, yet feeling that his character was not enough, whose very elevation of character put out its hands, and groped for something better than itself — a man dissatisfied, dissatisfied with the world, and yet unable to give it up; dissatisfied with himself, and yearning for something higher; feeling something in him that was empty, and that yearned and craved to be filled — such

a man on the threshold of the kingdom of God, earnestly entreated by Christ to enter, entreated with a look that said He loved him—and yet turning away!

How near we may be to the kingdom of God, and yet miss it! "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it."

XIII

THOMAS

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JOHN xx. 24–29

AMONG the many surprising things connected with Christ, this, at first sight, seems as surprising as anything: the number of men of such different characters that He gathered about Him. A modern teacher collects around him men of like turn and tastes with himself. If he is a man of intellect, it is men of intellect that gather around him. If he is a man of feeling, it is the tender-hearted and the tearful, the sympathetic and often the bereaved, who crowd to him to enjoy what in time becomes a luxury, and to weep over the exhibition of human woes, and the laying bare of broken hearts. But Christ gathered about Him men of every class, alike the tender and the severe, alike the credulous and the hard to convince. And considering who He was, the thing ceases to be wonderful.

The greatest of men are generally men of only one side. Indeed, it is often because they have only one side, that they are accounted great. They have some one quality or phase of mind or thought in perfection;

and all, who possess this quality in a less degree, admire and follow them. But Christ was not a man of one side but of all sides, possessed at once of the profoundest intellect and the tenderest feeling; and hence all found in Him what they sought. That which He said would be true of Him when He was lifted up, was felt before, that He drew all men after Him. It is fortunate, therefore, that the small body of His disciples contains such variety of characters, so that, in some one of them, each may find a mind akin to his own, and a history and life which may be helpful to him in shaping his own.

The apostle, of whom the circumstances in the passage before us are related, is not usually considered one of the most interesting or exemplary of the Twelve Yet in his doubt and subsequent faith there is an evidence stronger, perhaps, to us in this generation, than is to be found in the undaunted faith of all his brethren; and though he has suffered somewhat severely at the hands of expounders of Scripture, the justice of the judgment passed upon him may be questioned. There are sometimes in the obscurer characters of history, just as there are among the obscurer members of society, who do not play much part in public life, or draw the eyes of the general world to them, points of interest and instruction very attractive to those who are more closely familiar with them.

Now what this incident illustrates is the case of a man who had believed in Christ very sincerely, though

perhaps not very intelligently, or with great breadth of view. Over his mind there came, through the events of providence, a great darkness; but, at last, he emerged out of this darkness into clearer light than ever he had known before. The history of his unbelief is first recorded; and then, the history of his faith.

1. The Unbelief of Thomas.

In judging of the conduct of the apostle here it is very necessary, if we would judge him fairly, to have some conception of what kind of person he was. It is probable that, as Jesus chose only twelve disciples, He chose persons of distinct and marked character, in order that the truth of the gospel might in after ages shine among men, not with one colour of light, but in many colours. Now, in judging men's conduct, we need to know not only their circumstances, but, above all, their kind of mind. We need this even in judging of their religious conduct. For religion does not alter the natural cast of a man's mind; it only sanctifies and consecrates the natural disposition. The man who was impulsive before he was impressed with the truth, remains impulsive still, and will act impulsively even in religious things, though he may be taught gradually to guard against his impulsiveness. The man who is despondent and melancholic by nature will not be immediately transported by his faith into a clear air and sunny sky; although his natural disposition may be, to some extent, corrected by the many hopes set before him in the gospel, and even more by the healthy

activity into which it sets all his feelings. At all events, in forming an opinion of men's actions, we should endeavour, if we have the means, to get behind their actions and look at themselves. We should judge of their actions by what we have learned of the men, rather than, as we are so much inclined to do, judge the men from their actions, or, as often happens, from a single action.

Now, perhaps this apostle has suffered something in this way. Judging of this single action alone, and without inquiring into the particular type of mind belonging to this disciple, in which the key to his conduct might have been found, men have generally passed on Thomas a very severe judgment. The Church, for ages, has branded *infidel* on his brow. But this judgment is one that is not justified by the facts, and cannot be entertained by us. At all times and even to this day people are quite ready to scatter such epithets about with an open hand. It is an easy and complacent way of disposing of men. But it is often a shallow enough device. We show thereby but little insight into the nature of men or of God. If we could look into the hearts of those whom we so fling away from us, we should often find deep enough sorrows there, struggles to which we ourselves are strangers, wrestlings for truth and light without receiving it, and yearnings pent up and hidden from the general eye.

Human nature is oftentimes a deeper thing than we dream of; and that side of it which is turned

immediately to God, if we could search into it, we should frequently find scarred and seamed with marks of conflict and of wounds, which in our hasty judgment we never deemed could be there. Least of all is such a name as infidel to be put upon a disciple of the Lord, whom his Lord rebuked so gently, as if his doubt was more to his loss than to his blame, and whom He still recognised as one of His own, when He said to him: "Become, not faithless, but believing." Men do not suddenly shake themselves free of years of communion with the Holy One. The nature is too deeply dyed and penetrated through by all blessed influences, to have them washed out so suddenly. Thomas was confused rather than disbelieving; and his confusion was due more to defect of character than to badness of heart. He was a man whose heart was more active than his head. And thus he drank into his soul the Lord's teaching and life faster than his mind could frame it into ideas. In the fellowship of his God, though he knew it not, he lived a charmed and enchanted life, dreaming rather than thinking. And when that, out of which he drew his life, was taken away, he was bewildered; and hardly knew where his conflicting feelings were hurrying him.

Nor is that conception of his character, which has of late taken the place of the former ruder one, a whit more true — that conception which presents him as a man of sharp wits, and shrewd in his dealings with the world; suspicious of being imposed upon, and sub-

jecting all things to a rigid scrutiny; a man who, knowing the many tricks and deceptions afloat among men, must not only see a thing with his eyes, but put his hand to it, before he give it a place among the objects he believes to exist. That may be a useful, it is not a lofty, type of soul; and Thomas did not own it. Nor was he possessed of that heritage of woe, a sceptical mind. Things commonly reported among men did not seem antecedently improbable to him. He felt no overpowering impulse within him to unwind from himself all folds of faith or thought, which education or intercourse had rolled about him, and stand up a naked spirit, trusting to its own resources alone to master the problems of existence. The general law had not such an absorbing fascination for him as to make all deviations from it beyond the power of being thought. His cast of mind was of quite another class.

On two other occasions besides the present Thomas speaks; and there we find the key to his character. On the occasion when Christ, for the last time before His dying, addressed the assembled disciples, more than one of them interrupted him—Philip and Judas (not Iscariot) with clear articulate queries, Thomas only with a stammering tongue. Christ having assumed that the disciples knew the Father, Philip, with unexampled penetration, exclaimed: "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." That is man's great necessity. It is around the Father that thickest darkness gathers. It is after Him that human nature cries. It is to Him

that the heart of humanity sinks and swells like a great tide under the drawing of the heavens. Could it but be shown Him, its restlessness would be stilled for ever.

Thus it is given to Scripture to condense and articulate what all men in all places have been striving to utter. This is what migration and war mean; and the toil and the thought of all the nations. This is the word spoken by the tears of him who won the world, and found it nothing. This is the word that has been murmuring upon the fevered lip of the earth, since first it fell: "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Why will it not give heed to the answer of the True and Faithful Witness: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"? But Thomas has as yet no such clearness of sight. Jesus had spoken of going away; and the thought of that puts an end to His disciple's ability to follow words any more, and in helpless sorrow Thomas can but say: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

The other occasion on which Thomas speaks is in connexion with the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus had said, "Let us go into Judea again." When the other disciples remonstrated, and Jesus insisted, Thomas replied, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." It is not quite clear with whom it is that he proposes to die—whether with Christ or with Lazarus; most probably the former. But his peculiar temperament comes out equally well with both interpretations. If with Lazarus, this stroke of the death of a dear friend

had quite paralysed the man. Life had nothing any more to give him. His brethren remained, his master remained; but all that remained is forgotten, or, at least, obscured, in the loss of that which had been taken away. If it is the Lord that he will die with, it is equally easy to perceive the logic of Despondency. The disciples remonstrated with Jesus in regard to His idea of going into Judea again: "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again?" They dreaded the consequences. But what was to their minds but fear of a fatal issue, was certainty to Thomas. Of course there could be but one result, if the Lord ventured into Judea again; and He was bent upon going: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Thus the prevailing character of the man was this proclivity to despond, a certain want of buoyancy of mind, coupled perhaps with a feminine tenderness and sensitiveness, and, it may be, not without that self-will and obstinacy and love of solitude, which many times go along with too great delicacy of feeling. He was the kind of man whom one often observes in the East, of a gloomy dark exterior, to appearance emotionless and with a bent to melancholy, yet fervid and fiery within, like a stream of lava over which there gathers a hard black crust, but within there rolls a red molten stream of fire.

Now, consider what awful loss this man had sustained in the death of his Master, more awful and

perplexing, because what was lost was never fully understood. What streams of blessing had left his heart dry! What fulness of light had suddenly been eclipsed to his eyes! what hopes of a restored Israel blighted for ever! "We trusted that it had been He that should have redeemed Israel"; and, with a restored Israel, there would have been a redeemed world. These hopes had been gradually rising. Every miracle of Christ had been giving body to them. For years there had floated before the imagination of men like Thomas a gorgeous fabric of dominion and glory for Israel, with Christ as universal King, and His followers high in rank in His kingdom. And now this fabric had been dashed to the ground and shattered. With that tendency to be overcome by misfortune that was habitual to him, we do not wonder that Thomas abandoned the fellowship of the little company of disciples.

The apostle fled from the society of his brethren; he courted solitude. Henceforth he would live in himself. To form new friendships was but to whet new weapons to wound more deeply the already wounded spirit; it was but to hang new millstones around his neck, to plunge him deeper in misery. Perhaps, too, he had another reason. He wished to avoid the sight of what would awaken the recollection of his former joy, and so deepen his present dejection. The other disciples, more hopeful, and less acute in their feeling, kept together; and, by sharing their grief, lessened it: but to him the little company called up

recollections that were overpowering. A parent can understand this feeling, the parent who has loved and lost. Such a parent will give away the little clothes, and shun the little grave, lest too tender recollections should be awakened; and lest life, all that it contained to live for being buried, should seem absolutely too great a blank to exist in.

The rest of the brethren, after they had seen the Lord and been blessed by Him, went in quest of their despairing brother, and communicated to him the happy tidings, saying: "We have seen the Lord." But his malady was too deeply seated to be cured by men; and he answered, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe."

No doubt this answer does seem somewhat to favour the view of the apostle's character already alluded to, that he was of a cautious and critical turn of mind, demanding always the fullest proof before he believed, and yielding only to the evidence of his senses. But I think the peculiarity of his words can be explained otherwise. He was not that cool, calculating character he has been represented. He was not, as may appear, indifferent about the resurrection of the Lord; ready to yield to evidence if it was presented to him, and withholding faith till then. He was a man of a different sort. He was an impressible character; and an impression was, to him, far stronger evidence than any amount of testimony from others.

What, then, was the impression he was under now? It was this. He had been at the crucifixion, and witnessed all that went on there. He saw the Saviour raised upon the tree. He saw the nails driven home, and the spear thrust in. He saw it all, and felt it all. And he saw the Lord bleed and die. The whole picture fastened itself upon his mind; it was a constant impression which he carried about with him, and which he shuddered at every moment. And it is from this vivid impression that he speaks. He reads off the whole outline of it from his mind, feature after feature —the nails, the spear, the hands, the side: all the evidences of death. And until this impression be removed by another impression, nothing will make the man believe.

And perhaps there was yet one other cause of unbelief. In most things that we do, there is mixed up, some way or other, a sense of ourselves. In even our most unselfish deeds there is perhaps a certain selfishness, a certain reference to ourselves. So perhaps the apostle's own feeling of himself threw a certain shadow over what was told him by others, of what they had seen and received. "Why," he asked, "if the Lord was indeed risen, had He not appeared to him? He had been seen, it was said, by Peter, by Mary, by the disciples on the way to Emmaus; why had He not shown Himself to him? He who denied his Lord had seen Him; she whose life had been that of a sinner had seen Him; all of whatever sort had seen Him. Why not show Himself to me

also?" Thomas might ask. "Why should I be excluded? I never denied Him; I ever loved Him; and if I was not so forward, nor so profuse in my professions of affection, as some were, I loved Him none the less; and He knew it. I cannot recognise my Lord here."

An illustration might make these two last causes of doubt clearer. A father has seen his child swept overboard. He has seen him buffet the waves, and struggle manfully to keep himself up till assistance reach him. He has seen the rope thrown and missed. He was near enough to watch his strength grow feebler and feebler. He could hear his drowning cry, and see the look of agony on his face. Before aid reached him, he went down. But some time after, people tell him that his child was not lost after all; he was saved, and carried abroad, and has been communicating with his former friends. He cannot believe. He saw him sink. His cry for help, as he went down, still rings in his ears; and the whole scene is so vivid that nothing will drive the impression from his mind. And besides, why has he not made known to him his joyful escape? Surely his father is not the last to whom he would send word; but he has been silent. Here is a fatal flaw in the evidence: this is no child of his.

Now, perhaps these things all accumulated to cause this apostle's disbelief—the prevailing tendency of his mind to gloom, to forecast the worst; the impression the scene of the crucifixion had made upon him; and this partial appearance of the Lord, which his state

of mind dexterously laid hold of, and, instead of receiving it as evidence, turned into a proof of the contrary of what it was brought forward to support.

II. The Faith of Thomas.

We shall now advert very briefly to the apostle's change to belief. "And after eight days again, the disciples were within, and Thomas with them." How they had prevailed on him, we do not know. I daresay they had not argued or disputed much with him. But they had laid their own consciousness before him, their own strong convictions. These he saw, and he was moved by them. They did not cast him off; they brought the strength of their own faith and example to bear on him; and he came. In what mind, we do not know. Doubting still, certainly; with a divided mind, no doubt; tossed between his own want of experience and the strongly asserted experience of others. Their experience and faith could not give faith to him; that must come from another. But their faith intensified to him his sense of want of it in himself. So he yielded. He let himself be surrounded by the waters of a life which he did not yet share.

And it is well for us to do this in moments like those that had occurred in the life of Thomas. In despondency we flee from others. In desertion we turn away from men and their life. They do not feel what we feel; and we think they cannot comprehend it. Yet it is not amiss to abide where there is manifested a life in God. Our doubts are oftener things of the heart than of the

intellect; and the life of men goes to our heart. Our perplexities, though they take shape in our intellect, many a time go deeper down. It is with them as it is with disease. We fasten in our ignorance on some of its external symptoms, and insist, being unwilling to fancy otherwise, that the seat of the malady is there, though all the while it is deep and inward. Argument or evidence does little for us; but to be encircled with a deep flowing life quickens us. It is with the effects of such a life, as it is with the delicate perfume of some flower. If you press it, and seek to catch its aroma, you fail; the process is too coarse. But when you are beside it, the vagrant and casual winds waft to the nostrils the sweetest perfume. And so it is with the life of men who are constantly living unto God. It exhales upon all around them; and they, too, are quickened.

Thomas came on purpose to examine the wounds of the Lord. He was bent on reading "the evidences of Christianity." It does not appear that he carried his purpose into effect. The evidences were offered to him; but somehow, on their being offered, there was presented to him something larger. It was to be a matter of fingers and hands with him. He would become a Christian through his senses—through touch and sight. He was suddenly made aware that he had a larger sense, a sense belonging to his whole being, an eye and a hand not the organ of one faculty, but of his heart, which brought not the wounds of Christ but all Christ close to him.

That night there was solemn silence in the room where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews. The question rose to the lips of all, and all suppressed it, "Will He come?" Eyes were often turned to the face of the doubtful brother, to watch the play of feelings there. Sometimes it was a look of compassion, for his trouble could not be concealed; he trembled at the coming footfall, and yet sank into sadness, when it died away. Sometimes it was with a look of suspicion that they eyed him. If the Lord come not, it will be because of him; his unbelief will keep Him away. Fools and slow of heart, they might have known that that would bring Him! For the whole need not a physician.

Now, we cannot fail to learn from this history what attitude to assume towards those in doubt. There is indeed a kind of doubt which parades itself, and glories in its scepticism, and assumes airs of mystery, and frightens you with horrible pictures of the consuming distemper that "burns within." No such thing. This doubt never gets within. It is a superficial thing, a youthful disease, an eruption on the skin merely, and to be ministered to in the way suitable to such maladies. True doubt like that of Thomas is reserved, and hides itself, and consumes away in moody silence, and speaks of all things sooner than itself.

How, then, shall we deal with doubt? Shall we think our duty done by it, when we call it—infidel? So modern Christianity sometimes thinks. The Lord and

His disciples thought otherwise. They had only prayers for it; and He took the trouble to come and dispel it. Cast no man off. Doubts are more things of the heart than the head; and ten to one they are but temporary shadows which grief, or sin, or loss has thrown across it. If you can bring the Sun of righteousness to arise on them, they will flee away. This doubt of Thomas arose from excess of love, from a derangement of the machinery of the heart which grief had shaken into frost. I know not if it be so now; but it was so with Job and other men of old, when God smote them to excess. The suddenness of the stroke paralysed their hearts. For He, the only resource in sorrow, was thus the cause of their sorrow. And when a man loses hold of God, he sorely enough needs a human hand to grasp. Doubt, like that of Thomas, may be wayward. "Ye have need of patience"—and affection.

And we gather from it too a lesson as to how to deal with ourselves, when God withdraws, or when He smites. Grief is moody and reserved. Abandonment may drive us into the wilderness, or lock us up in our own feelings, with an impassive and impenetrable front to the world. Men cannot share and cannot lighten our grief. They cannot supply our loss. They cannot even, in their dismal levity, comprehend it. There is nothing left us. "Let us go, that we may die with Him."

This also is a mistake. No doubt the memory of former joy embitters present bereavement. The eye

sickens to behold the scenes and accompaniments of untold happiness now gone. And to see the congregation still worshipping, where we worshipped in the days when God was with us, and His candle shined upon our heads, may drive us like Thomas to flee from their presence, because we had gone with them to the house of God, with voice of joy and praise; and joy and praise are no longer possible to us. Yet the course of David should be ours. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him. I will say unto God, Why hast Thou forgotten me?" It is well for us, even against our feeling, still to frequent the society of believers, to go with them where prayer is wont to be made, where Christ is wont to appear. And assuredly, as He came to Thomas—came mainly for his sake—He will come also to us, and will bless us.

It is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness. Disbelief is always a thing chiefly of the heart. Some sudden shake has deranged that delicate organ; some loss has paralysed it, frozen it into stone; some of its longings have failed to be supplied, or its aspirations, like smoking flax, have been rudely stamped upon and quenched. Then, being unwilling to believe that the heart is otherwise than right, we lay the blame of our infidelity on some outside thing—want of evidence, the contradictions in Revelation, the scandalous life of Christians. Could we but see this question answered reasonably, or this contradiction reconciled honestly, or this seeming immorality or cruelty ascribed openly to

God, explained satisfactorily, we should believe. There are thousands to whom these things present no difficulty, who will not believe; and there are thousands to whom they are tremendous anxieties, who nevertheless believe with all the firmness their natures are capable of. Were these things all cleared up, you would not even then believe, without something further. With that something further, even though they may never be cleared up, you will believe. It is Christ Himself, not the evidence of Him, not preaching of Him or reading of Him—it is He Himself that brings faith. Thomas sought a sight of His wounds; he wished to read the Evidences. Christ Himself came, and superseded all that. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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